

Look For The Silver Lining

By

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HUNDREDS of men are engaged in nursing duties round the clock, not only in India but in most countries. In olden days, men were the first in the field ; there is reference to the attendants (nurses) in Ayurveda, Charaka Samhitha and Susritha Samhitha. The qualities desirable in these nurses were "Knowledge of manner in which drugs should be prepared or compounded for administration, cleverness, devotedness to the patients waited upon ; and purity (both of mind and body) are the four qualifications of the attending nurses".

Buddhist Monastries and early Christian religious orders concerned with the care of the sick, were mainly composed of men. Men continued to give help in this field even after the Nightingale era. Two of the greatest names in the Social Service closely associated with the sick are : Henry Dunant and St. Vincent de. Paul.

Some countries are making excellent use of men in nursing. England can be taken as a good example where no man who wants to make nursing his carrier is denied the opportunity ; where the total number of men is nearly half the number of nurses, if the figures of all branches of nursing are combined. Some countries have kept the number of men in nursing to the minimum, depending upon the philosophy and culture of the people.

About 10% of India's nurses are men. A few of them occupy senior positions. For example, there is one holding the post of Superintendent of Nursing Services in a State Nursing Service ; about six are Nursing Superintendents and others are assistant nursing superintendents. A number are Tutors while a fair number are Ward Masters but the bulk are staff nurses, who have dedicated themselves in spite of discrimination and other handicaps.

In a country like ours where the sexes are still very much segregated, it seems to me that there is a very definite place — and a considerable need—for men nurses in the profession. It is astonishing that men nurses have not been recruited to the Public Health Field where they could render good service in the rural areas. We are all aware of the problems (and not a few tragedies) that have come about by placing young inexperienced women nurses, health visitors and midwives in the rural areas. It is absurd to insist that the bar to putting men in the Public Health Field is because they are not midwives. It is my understanding that the public health nurse is primarily in the field to teach healthful living—not to practise midwifery ; there are midwives for midwifery. Anyhow, why should not the men nurses be given an orientation in obstetrics as is done in the U.S.A. Indeed, since many men nurses have had to cope with midwifery cases from time to time, it seems necessary that they be given some preparation to meet emergencies.

There is far too much loose talk about men nurses and their usefulness. If they are not as useful as expected, then surely the educators are at fault. We have heard authorities say that 'We cannot appoint a man to be a tutor because he cannot teach female catheterisation, gynaecological procedures' etc. but how much practical demonstration in the male genito-urinary area do women tutors carry out ? It is just about even, isn't it ?

It is time for authorities to look upon men nurses as members of the nursing profession and not view them as members of the male sex. A good healthy and common sense view on the problem of men *versus* women, is what

is needed in the nursing profession.

A few words of encouragement to men nurses—I will repeat what I said some years ago :

1. You can recognise your place and role in bringing health to the people of our great country.

2. You can do your best, despite discouraging factors, to improve the nursing situation wherever you are working.

3. You can make a determined effort to widen your horizon, both educational and professional.

4. You can realise that each one of us have some thing to contribute for the betterment of nursing standards, and act accordingly.

5. You can act without faltering if you believe what you are doing is worthwhile. In short, you can see the silver lining even in a dark cloud remembering if we do not act for ourselves, we cannot expect others to do so. We can build up public opinion by our example and by various other means.

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