THE STUDENT HEALTH PROGRAMME

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To have a good health programme for our students, every one from the top administrator in the hospital down to the sweeper, needs to feel a sense of responsibility for his health, if the student is to be protected. Otherwise disease may be spread by a member of the staff who has not an understanding of the principles of healthful living. It is important that each employee in the hospital feels that he is a member of the health team, thus he may teach the patients. Only as the student herself learns to live healthfully, can she teach others and thus become what every nurse today should be—a good public health nurse as one deals with the public in the hospital as much as one does in the home.

When we think of health, we think of the World Health Organization’s definition: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.” To bring about optimal health for the student in all these phases, plus spiritual health, without which one cannot have mental health, we must consider how this can be accomplished.

Physical Health

What plans must be made for the student’s physical health?

Before her arrival in the School of Nursing, the student should submit a physical health and dental health certificate to certify that she is in good physical and mental health; that necessary corrections have been made before coming and that she has been vaccinated against smallpox, at least. This is a protection to the school as the parents then cannot accuse the school of not asking for this if she makes the trip to the hospital and then is refused admission on health grounds.

Within the first week after arrival, she should have a complete physical examination after it has been explained to her. This helps allay her fears. A history should be taken, weight, blood pressure, laboratory tests such as stool, urine, blood for Kahn, hemoglobin, chest x-ray, screening of eyes, ears and skin; observation of any abnormality is recorded. If there is a public health nurse on the staff she may arrange for the completion of these before the doctor makes the final physical examination. If not, it will be necessary to arrange for examinations by the school of nursing. The physical examination should be thorough and made by a senior member of the hospital staff, if possible a woman, who is appointed by the Medical Superintendent. As soon as reports are received, any corrections such as worm treatment, low haemoglobin, further eye examination, tonsillectomy and immunizations should be arranged, after thorough explanation to the student. If an operation is necessary at any time during the student period, it is wise to get the consent of parent or guardian before doing so, unless in an emergency when the nursing superintendent will have to assume the responsibility; or if a school of nursing, the director of the school. Any student who is unlikely to stand the stress of nursing should not be accepted.

The student should learn the importance of the responsibility which she should assume to maintain her own health. A visiting hour suitable for both student and staff, should be set each day and the student should feel that the Health Room is a place to which she can come for help. For emergencies, arrangements should be made with the O.P.D. or with the hospital staff, to have the student report and get the necessary attention.

Each month the staff and students should be weighed; loss of weight may indicate ill-health.

All students and the staff should be protected against typhoid fever and smallpox soon after arrival; they are tuberculin tested, and negative reactors must receive B.C.G. Diphtheria and tetanus toxoid are also important but have to be given separately as the combined toxoid is not available in India and triple vaccine is expensive and unnecessary. Cholera and plague inoculations are advisable if these diseases are endemic in the area or at any time if there is an outbreak or contact with such diseases.

Yearly physical examinations should be done. This should include chest x-ray and screening and booster inoculations. Typhoid needs booster shots yearly, smallpox every three years. Cumulative records on each student and the staff (both nursing and domestic) with corrections, should be kept, and treated as confidential.

When nurses and doctors take care of their health and come to the same Clinic as the student nurses, they set a good example. The staff should encourage the students to report early and receive the necessary care, instead of criticising the student for doing so.

The domestic staff can be helped through classes that teach them to

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practice good personal hygiene in
care of sputum, stools, washing of
hands; sweeping with dump brooms
or sawdust so as to not raise dust,
thus avoid spreading disease to
themselves and others. They can
be helped to feel that each domestic
staff member is an important mem-
ber of the health team, which they
are.

The Hospital and Hostel
Environment

This should provide for safe
drinking water and safe water to
wash the mouth; a place to expec-
torate and one in which to throw
waste so that flies may not breed;
that food is handled in a clean
manner; that water is available for
bathing and washing of clothes and
a place in which to dry the clothes
where they will not be stolen. The
light and ventilation should be good
so as to avoid strain on the eyes.
There should be a special room
space for eating, study, outdoor
and indoor recreation and provi-
dation for privacy. Supervision is
necessary to ensure that the hospital
and hostel are used to the best
advantage. A sufficient number of
suitable latrines should be available
and the student taught to use them
properly.

Nutrition

The diet is one of the big
headaches in a school of nursing.
When one group is pleased, the
other is unhappy. Only if the diet
is planned by a capable person and
the students help to analyse its
nutritional value, will it become well-
balanced; it can be varied consider-
ably to please the different tastes.
Care needs to be taken to see that
protein supplies for the vegetarians
is adequate and that the food pro-
vided is all eaten by the students,
not thrown to the dogs and cats.
For this supervision is necessary.

When the dining room is clean,
pleasant, dishes attractive and food
attractively served, the students are
more tempted to eat. Curds are
often willingly accepted when made
of powdered milk, whereas re-
constituted milk itself is refused.
The students can learn to take a
pride in their dining room and help
to keep it clean. A few flowers on
the table helps to make it attractive.

Much food value could be con-
served if foods were properly
cooked. For example, short-time
cooking of green vegetables and
potatoes. Fresh and raw fruits and
vegetables have higher food values
than when cooked.

Students learn in bacteriology
classes about the presence of
bacteria on the hands and under the
nails, but how many student
nurses and staff members are
required to eat with a fork and
a spoon, thus cutting down the
chance of infection? Should this
not be a requirement for all
staff and students in a hospital or
school of nursing? Will this not
be a protection to their health?
Are the dishes always properly
washed with soap or a detergent
and hot water and rinsed with
boiling water? Is the food well
handled by those serving? Are
the kitchen and the dinning room
protected from flies?

Hygiene

Tooth brushes which are clean
and are properly used are necessary
to clean the teeth properly as it is
impossible to get in between teeth
properly with the fingers.

Where it is cold, the student
needs to have sufficient warm
blankets, and a sweater worn as
such instead of as a muffler around
the neck. Students need an un-
berilla when it rains not only to
protect their caps but their bodies
from getting wet. A sufficient
number of blouses and saries are
needed to keep the student clean.
If her underwear is clean and hair
removed from the axilla it helps to
prevent body odours. She will
find that people want her as a
friend if she is fresh and attractive.
This helps her emotionally and
mentally, as otherwise when she
has body odours no one wants her
near them.

The nurse should learn the
importance of wearing chappals
to prevent hookworm infection so
that when she goes home on leave
she will not run around in her
bare feet and often get infected or
reinfected. Everyone needs to
learn the importance of using soap
and plenty of friction when wash-
ing hands; quantities of water
poured on without this do little
good; and dipping hands in and
out of bacteria-laden lotion, do
more harm than good.

Recreation

Recreation means re-creation.
How may we be recreated? Some
may be through books, others
through music, oral music, enthu-
siasm, bicycle ride, a game of bad-
minton or tennis. All need a place
and the time that they may be alone
to think, or to pray; a time to get
gether in social gatherings where
they may learn to know each other
and have fun together, thus break-
ing down prejudices by getting to
know those from other communi-
ties who speak a different language,
have religious differences and have
customs different from their own.
If we budget our time there should
be time for work, study and play
in our daily life.

Mental Health

All have mental and emotional
problems. The student nurse who
has been loved at home and has
felt secure, can much more easily
meet her problems and help others
to meet their successfully. This
student will learn to use the over-
coming of difficulties to help her to
mature emotionally. Those who
have not had this family love,
understanding and security may
need much more help to adjust to
the new situation in the school of
nursing, to the food, to the new
regimen set. Much understanding
and patience will be needed to
help such a student. This type of
student needs to feel that she has
a friend in at least one senior
staff member to whom she may
turn for help and understanding.
This help may sometimes be in the
form of discipline which will dis-
pel her feeling of guilt if fairly
administered, and if it will help
her to grow. The Health Room
should be a place to which the
student can feel free to come and
talk over her mental, physical,
social and even her spiritual
problems. The public health nurse
should know when she is capable
of helping a student nurse or when
the student should be referred to
some one else, and
whom this should be. The student
needs to be helped to understand
herself, and why she does as she
does, and to overcome fear, which

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