

Academic Freedom in Nursing Education

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WITH the present emphasis on the need for the improvement of the quality of nursing education all over India, the privilege of academic freedom would have a major contribution to make to the development of better schools of nursing. For, with academic freedom to nurse educators within a hospital or collegiate school, comes the challenge of finding new and progressive patterns of educational systems, which would try to further meet the health needs of the day. These systems would be based on concrete outcomes and findings of experimental programmes and research projects, thus providing valuable knowledge to supplement our existing programmes.

Academic freedom should be an integral feature of any educational programme which seeks to bring out the best in the School of Nursing faculty and in the graduates from that school. Where there is no academic freedom, faculty and student growth are at a minimum, if not at a complete standstill. This would mean the same traditional schools with no recognition or little impetus for new ideas or further progress in the area of curricula revision.

On the other hand, academic freedom would mean new avenues of thought, re-evaluation and reorganisation of the traditional curriculum content. It would be hoped that the addition of revised educational material would be welcomed, even though contrary to past thinking. This would indicate that the faculty feel secure to exercise their privilege of academic freedom in seeking for growth and stimulation of the students.

The teacher should be able to teach what she sincerely believes

to be true without being afraid of saying so. The freedom accorded to her should be such that she is not required to eliminate such information and discussion from her classes merely because it does not conform to the ideas of a few members of the faculty. It would also be evident that she would not be required to instruct and imbue her students with ideas and concepts of which she herself does not hold to as legitimate and honest.

"Academic Freedom" says a distinguished editor, Mr. W.T. Couch "is that principle designed to protect the teacher from the hazards that tend to prevent him from meeting his obligations in the pursuit of truth. The obligations of the teacher are to direct the truth; and the teacher who, in order to please everybody, suppresses important information or says things he knows are not true, or refrains from saying things that need to be said in the interests of truth, betrays his calling and renders himself unworthy to belong to the company of teachers."

However, no teacher is at liberty to teach anything just because he feels it is true. Academic freedom would enable the teacher in his pursuit of knowledge to read, study, analyse and interpret new ideas and thoughts if he finds them as suitable learning experiences. To the nurse educator this would mean the liberty of questioning and examining the various facets of the School of Nursing curriculum e.g. teaching methods. The lecture method has been used exclusively to an advantage for a long time, but the teacher should feel free to try out newer methods like the seminar and role-play methods of teaching. This would presuppose that both

the teacher and the student had a clear idea of what was required of each of them.

The same reasoning would apply to the use of carefully prepared case study presentations as teaching aids, rather than covering the care of the patient system by system as it has been done for many years. With better qualified tutors it may be possible to keep doctor's classes at a minimum, leaving most of the instruction in the basic clinical areas to nursing tutors. Doctors would only be called in to discuss the various specialities.

Hours spent in clinical practice on the wards is a controversial subject at the best of times. But one should be able to critically appraise long hours of duty to see how much time is really needed for true learning to take place, and at what point learning becomes repetitious.

Adequate facilities and opportunities should be available for research projects, both in the area of education and patient care. The faculty should feel at ease to work on these without feeling obliged to only limiting their time to regular instruction.

Does the nurse educator feel free to include these kinds or types of activity along with her work, or does she feel bound to continue established and set patterns for fear of reproof? If these types of thinking are evident, it would reflect that academic freedom is present in the Schools of Nursing.

Perhaps academic freedom does exist to a greater or lesser degree in many of our schools today. Every teacher would then have the responsibility of using this freedom to develop a more conducive type

of learning environment for her students. The teacher who does not recognise the challenge of constantly seeking to finding a better quality of education for her students, is failing to give something vital to her teaching. If we recognise this privilege, we may help to encourage complacent teachers who teach the same type of material year after year with no thought or desire for change, to keep up with the accelerated peace of the modern world.

No freedom, whether academic or otherwise, in a School of Nursing or elsewhere, comes without its restrictions; *for with freedom comes responsibility and discipline.* Therefore, when a teacher exercises her right of academic freedom, she should be aware of the responsibility which is very much a part of this freedom. If the teacher is able to ask these two questions of her teaching: (1) What will this mean personally and collectively to the students whom I teach to give better patient care? (2) How will my teaching affect them as citizens of a free world? If she can answer these questions with satisfaction, then there is everything to be gained from her teaching.

This is indeed a freedom and privilege we have as teachers and it is ours as long as we continue to use it constructively to render the highest service possible to all mankind. Therefore let us use it in the most desirable way so that we will not jeopardise this ancient right for the teachers in the years to come, for they, too, will want to seek and establish new ways of meeting the needs of the student nurses of tomorrow.

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