

The Responsibility of a Professional Nurses' Association for the Improvement of Nursing Education

By Barbara Shield

Deputy Matron, Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital, Adelaide, Australia

WHAT are the responsibilities of a Professional Nurses' Association for the improvement of nursing education? Before we can commence to consider responsibilities in relation to improvement of nursing education, we must clarify in our minds the true meaning of education and its implications in regard to nursing. I offer you, therefore, the following definitions as a basis for our thinking: firstly, education is a continuing process, the preparation for complete living through full growth and development of the capacities of the individual, and self-realisation of his individuality. Secondly, nursing is an art and a science, directed towards the spiritual, mental and physical health of members of the community, involving teaching of preservation and promotion of health, care and comfort of the sick, and concerning itself with the well-being of the individual, the family and the community. From these definitions it follows that our aim in nursing education (and I refer to education for all nurses and not only for student nurses) should be to establish a climate for, and an understanding of, education as preparation for life and living, by encouraging nurses to think and to reason, equipping them to grow and develop in professional service, personal stature and usefulness as citizens, and as nurses. Particular emphasis must be placed on two points—the first—we are discussing education. In recent years much stress has been placed on education of nurses as opposed to training of nurses. As nurses we claim to be educated and to be educators, and, if those claims are to be allowed, we must educate ourselves and

others in the fullest sense of the word "education". The second point—having in mind the definition of education, we must not forget that education must be for all nurses, wherever they are, whatever they are, through all their lives.

The aim of any educational system is based on three needs of the subjects of that system—the technological, the cultural and the developmental needs. Nursing education is no exception and, in planning our nursing educational systems, we must aim to meet these needs.

The technological aspects are the skills, from the most simple manual to the most complex technical skills, that a nurse is required to develop to enable her to perform part of her function; in this area must be included, as well, the scientific knowledge of health and disease and of body processes and a technical understanding, sufficient to enable her to utilise her skills and knowledge to a maximum. Cultural needs are essentially interwoven with others; these are related to understanding of human nature and behaviour, and find background in an appreciation of history and expression in recognition of the importance of the highest moral attitudes and standards of values. To meet these needs we must provide facilities and opportunities for development of general basic skills, and for liberal education which deepens the structure of knowledge and widens the vision.

The third aspect relates to the need of the individual for the conditions under which becomes possible the full development of her individuality. Thus, briefly, there

are three major aims in nursing education and they are complementary; a satisfactory education system will seek to secure all three, that is, training in technical skill, promotion of culture and development of the individual.

If we accept this definition of the aims of nursing education, what are the responsibilities of a Professional Nurses' Association in meeting these needs? What can a Professional Nurses' Association do for the improvement of nursing education? Firstly, we must all be fully aware that a Professional Association has responsibilities for the improvement of nursing education; this should be clearly stated in the aims and objectives of the Association and should be known to, and understood by, each and every member. Secondly, we must have both short term and long term plans to meet responsibilities; the short term plans, ideally; being steps in a long term plan, as a logical progression towards a desired end, rather than expedient means by which one problem is solved and another is created. In planning, the aim should be to improve, to progress, to perfect as nearly as possible, and to improve again. Thirdly, plans must be evaluated in relation to aims, and progressive evaluation of achievement must be used to validate both aims and plans. No plan should ever be regarded as complete, static or inflexible for it must move and grow in accordance with needs; step-by-step it must be tested against the desired result and the result, defined as desirable, must be tested in relation to its contribution towards reaching a goal.

Work, which has been done in

the near past, and is being done at present, under the auspices of various bodies, particularly National Nurses' Associations and our International Organisation, is doing much to improve nursing education in various aspects; through enquiry, study, research, collation of data and publication of reports and recommendations has come a conscious awareness of the need for evaluation of activities and achievements in terms of stated aims and objectives; and for testing the validity of determined goals. Much time has been spent in consideration of content and method. Establishment of education committees, appointment of education officers, conduct of conferences, group discussions and promotion of post-graduate study are ways in which Professional Associations can, and, in fact, are, endeavouring to meet their responsibilities. The Education Division of I.C.N. and our own recently-formed Education Division in Australia, are examples of international and national attempts towards improvement of nursing education. Thus, we move towards better means and methods of meeting technological and cultural needs of nurses, of providing the highest degree of service which is possible and of improving conditions to provide for ever-improving service—though much remains still to be done.

I believe, however, that the nursing profession, in common with many educational groups, neglects consideration of the significance of individual development and its contribution to the whole, which I regard as the real and ultimate purpose of education. (There is even a trend, in some minds, to value uniformity and standardisation to the exclusion of originality, and to demand mechanistic production according to a pattern, to admire the stereotype and to find comfort in the mediocre.) Without doubt we are not the only ones who give less than due attention to the aspect of individual development, but that is no reason to ignore the challenge to aim at the ideal education. Because of

the² increasing efforts directed towards improvement in meeting the technological and cultural needs, and because I believe that without attention to the vital aspect of individual development, no Professional Association can hope to meet its responsibilities for the improvement of education. I propose to consider mainly this aspect.

One of the objects formerly stated in the I.C.N. Constitution and By-laws, Article II, is, and I quote.

"The I. C. N. stands for that full development of the human being and citizen in every nurse which shall best enable her to bring her professional knowledge and skill to the many-sided service that society demands of her,"...

and I think we could well add, in our own minds, these words from Sir Percy Nunn, British educational philosopher—

"and shall enable (her) to make (her) original contribution to the variegated whole of human life as full and as truly characteristic as (her) nature permits".

To reach truly professional heights and to deserve the status of profession, we must widen our thinking and our teaching, and ensure that—through our educational systems—we strengthen the sense of the worth of individuality of all persons, not only for the benefit of the person, but for the benefit of all society.

Individuality must not be considered as implying a separation from society or an anti-social attitude, for it is only developed in a social setting; it is only through relationships with the greatest possible number of ideas from outside that it attains its highest peak. Each of us is unique, each of us is born with certain capacities and potentialities which may come from our immediate forbears, or from further back the line. As we pass through the various and varied environmental stages of our lives, we absorb from our contacts something of themselves—in early life from home, parents and siblings, in school life from teachers and fellow students and so on: what

we take from others is peculiar to us and becomes part of us—thus is the personality and individuality developed in a social setting under the influences of others from whom inspiration is drawn. Nursing is a social profession and, as such, its educational systems or patterns can only be developed in a social setting of communication between its practitioners. Its aim is to produce nurses who will serve and teach, and neither service nor teaching will be optimal until those concerned are adequately developed, stimulated to and interested in, vitally and positively, making their maximum contribution to the ultimate welfare of mankind.

We acknowledge the fact that society has a claim upon each and every one of us and we must recognise that society and its culture is enriched by the diversity of contributions of its own members. This promotion of individual development which I have quoted from the Objects of I.C.N. thus becomes a responsibility of the organisation by its own claims and definition: but, even if it is not stated in the objects of an association, it is a moral responsibility of any organisation, of any body or of any one person in a leadership position to educate, and, through education, to promote growth and development of individual capacities.

We live in troubled times—in the past three decades there have been tremendous upheavals over all the world. We also live in times from which, as idealists, we can envisage the promise and possibility of a great and glorious future. As nurses we are citizens of the world and, I believe, we do have one of the nearest approaches to a truly international outlook—our I.C.N. and its activities is proof of that. Look at our definition of nursing—spiritual, mental and

**A paper presented at the
ICN 12th Quadrennial
Congress**

physical health—well being of human beings—teaching people. "It is the duty of nurses to teach people how to live—our patients are people, people everywhere, sick and well, needing our technical ability, but needing also the comfort, the guidance, the faith and the inspiration we can give them. We, as a profession, have this responsibility and only in one way can this responsibility be fully met — through professional association. Florence Nightingale said, "Professions, like nations, can only flourish through an individual sense of corporate responsibility," and it is through professional association that corporate responsibility can be achieved. A professional association is the voice of the members collectively, and it should be a stimulus to members individually. It is the duty of a Professional Nurses' Association to ensure that its members are able and enabled, to teach people to live.

But what is a Professional Nurses' Association? What is its life force? Who is responsible for it and its activities? The answer to all these questions is—its members—not forgetting that among these constituent members are those who have been members in the past, those who gave us our heritage, and those who will be members in the future, who are our posterity. An association consists of a number of members who give it its strength, its vitality—or its lethargy—it is the members who are responsible, collectively and individually, and without individual efforts, collective activity is abortive. The association thus becomes, like ourselves, a composite body, having unity in diversity, and the more the individual in an organisation grows as a person, the more can the organisation accomplish, and the more the organisation grows, the more scope is there for the individual to grow and to develop as a person.

A Professional Nurses' Associ-

ation, as an official organ of nursing, must interpret nurses and nursing to the community, and the community to nursing. Literally, by its very existence, by its name, it accepts responsibility for nurses and to nurses—more specific responsibilities are found in the functions of statutory bodies, hospitals and other agencies but, overall, the broadest and deepest responsibility belongs to the Professional Association. It is the Professional Nurses' Association which must concern itself with the true educational standards in relation to prerequisites for basic and post basic courses, by consideration of general standards of basic education existing in the country, potential sources of recruits, prevailing conditions in other professions as well as the needs of the nursing profession. It concerns itself with content of courses through investigation and makes recommendations regarding the sciences and the extent to which they are dealt with, with cultural subjects such as history and ethics, with ability in language expression, with selection and preparation of leaders. It advises statutory bodies on minimum standards, and it can assist individual persons and units to reach for maximum standards.

Associations are governed or controlled by management committees which are expected to perform miracles, and frequently do assume responsibility for the whole organisation at the cost of considerable personal effort to a few, or sometimes, sadly, at the cost of personal ownership by a few, but nothing like the improvements which are desirable can be achieved until each and every one of the members of the organisation is playing her individual part and making her own unique contribution. Without exceptions, nurses who are actively engaged in nursing have something to contribute to that whole which is nursing education. It may be by teaching students or it may be by teaching graduate nurses, either in a classroom or in ward; it may be by recording accurately and writing about nursing experiences which

take place in apparent isolation from the rest of the nursing world. It may be by example, by guidance and counselling; it may occur in a hundred or so ways. It does, in fact, exist—this teaching-learning relationship—but it is frequently affected unconsciously, perhaps haphazardly, without planning and preparation. And why is this so? It happens thus because, and quite simply because, of ignorance of the scope and the significance of the *individual contribution* to the whole, and of the importance of the development of full potential of the individual. Potential resources are not being tapped, abilities are lying dormant for want of some opportunity for bringing them to light and life, for want of stimulus, appreciation and recognition. Like Socrates, the Professional Association should be the midwife for the birth of ideas, of abilities and of capacities.

Every nurse has a contribution to make to nursing education. Every nurse has a responsibility for the education of other nurses, as well as for the members of the community, and until we realise this and accept it and act upon it, much effort to reach improvement in nursing education is wasted: there can be no short cut to permanent improvement. How many Nursing Associations can define their aims of nursing education? How many really recognise the importance of the individual? How many nurses have broad vision and how many have formulated a philosophy of life? What, to each of us, is the real and ultimate purpose of education? By defining these things whether it be done by the controlling body of the association or by the individual nurse, it brings them to notice. It encourages thought, discussion and even argument and goes another step along the way to meeting obligations in relation to education and, in so doing, increases awareness of these basic factors.

In some way the controlling body should reach all the members of the Association, and all members should be able to reach the controlling body. To be a member of

the controlling body is a valuable experience, one which is available to comparatively few members. It is a developmental experience, the value of which should not be denied to general members, and it behoves the controlling body to make available some such benefits to general members. It becomes a problem of communication, intensified by the difficulties of distance, of time, of stimulating interest, of receptiveness, of understanding and of perception. The media of communication are many and varied, including, particularly for education, the spoken and the written word at conferences, meetings and discussions and all types of publications. Like all communication it must be multi-directional, embracing all members. How often we find members of a Professional Association who are not even sure of their membership and who really do not know what it is all about, what it does, what is the good of all those meetings! These are the people whose abilities and capacities are hidden, whose potential is not developed and these are the people, who must be brought into the circle of activity and developed in order that they, in turn, may assist in development of others with whom they have contact. As the circle of participating members is widened, so then, will membership be increased until all nurses can be reached through the ranks of the Association. As the controlling body reaches all members, problems, and difficulties can be shared, factual data can be disseminated, participation can be encouraged and each member, stimulated by the sense of having a worthwhile contribution to make, develops along her own unique lines.

Consider again the controlling body of a Professional Association—it has an executive or management function. Let us look, then, for the functions of management in any organization. First—to formulate aims and objectives of the association and to help members, individually and in groups, to define and to understand their own particular objectives and their roles in relation to the whole, establishing and maintaining a mutuality of purpose and a continuity of activity.

Second—to disseminate available information on conditions, resources, facilities, etc., which have been found satisfactory in obtaining high standards of service, encouraging study and evaluation of all activities. Third—to arrange the functional structure of the organization and its total resources so that all members are encouraged and enabled to make their maximum contribution. Fourth—to relate individual and group efforts to the advancement of the aims and objectives of the organization. Each of these functions requires an optimal system of efficient and effective communications, and the best standards of personnel relations within the organization; together they lead to promotion of individual development.

Earlier in this paper I was somewhat derogatory about uniformity; I now wish to qualify that criticism. We do want some uniformity—we want every nurse to contribute to the activities of the Professional Association, every nurse prepared, through education, to contribute her maximum to the furthering of the aims of the nursing profession; we want every nurse to know her total responsibilities, her aims and objectives, to develop her potentialities: but that is as far as our uniformity can go; beyond this we need the individuality of every nurse.

It is doubtful if we can develop a plan to guide our educationists in their developmental programmes—as the aim is individual development, so ideas and their application must be individual. We reach the first step in finding a solution to any problem when we become aware that there is a problem. This problem is not an easy one and our first step must be to publicise it amongst ourselves and create an awareness of it, of all that we know about it and of its significance, as we see it.

In concluding I wish to recapitulate certain points. That a Professional Nurses' Association has a responsibility for nursing education there can be no doubt—we need also to recognise the fact that any responsibility of a Professional Nurses' Association is our responsibility, the responsibility of each and every one of us.

There can be no doubt either that nursing education should be such as to develop and to continue to develop in a nurse all the skills and the knowledge which are necessary for her to perform her function and should provide her with the ability to use her knowledge. I have emphasised the importance of full development of individuality without which the technical and cultural aspects of her education have less than maximum value. A nurse is required, by virtue of her professional status, to give of her best—which she cannot do unless her own unique best is developed.

It is particularly the vision of education and its full meaning, its scope and its significance which is the responsibility of the Professional Nurses' Association. The vision which leads to continuous development and growth, maximum contribution and a positive attitude towards responsibility on the part of members. The vision to see that in the train of education comes preparedness for performance of all other functions. Optimal education of itself ensures optimal service, promotes satisfactory public relations, assures professional status, enables fulfilment of all other functions of a Professional Nurses' Association. Education of all nurses, members and those beyond the Association, is the first and most important function and is a moral responsibility upon us. In education lies the key to meeting all our responsibilities, that is, if we accept its true meaning. Let us bear in mind these words of A. N. Whitehead, "Education is impossible without habitual greatness of vision."

Bibliography

- Barnard, Chester I.—*Organisation and Management*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts. 1948.
- Bridges, D.C.—*It is the Duty of Nurses to Teach People How to Live*. R.A.N.F. Congress Papers, Australia. 1955.
- Jacks, M.L.—*Modern Trends in Education*. Melrose, London. 1952.
- Joad, C.E.M.—*About Education*. Faber and Faber, London. 1945.
- Nunn, T.P.—*Education—Its Data and First Principles*. Arnold, London. 1923.
- Richmond, K.—*Education for Liberty*. Collins, London. 1918.
- Whitehead, A.N.—*The Aims of Education*. Cambridge University Press. 1917.