

The Role of Today's Nurse in Society

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I thank you for the privilege of speaking at this Symposium, on the "Social Aspects of Nursing".

Nursing, we believe, is the oldest profession in the world. Tracing a brief history, we note that three factors, namely, religious fervour, wars, and advances in medical science, have brought it to its present position.

I would like to add a fourth factor, of special pertinence to India namely, the Social Revolution that is making heavy and realistic demands that we have tended to ignore.

A person is a social being, a member of various groups, some into which he is born, others which he joins. They play a continuous and effective part in developing his character and personality.

A patient is a person and a social being who lives and moves within social situations and groups; the family, the community, the occupational, religious, racial, state and individual. Our whole social structure is being affected by these changes. Neither the nurse nor any other individual can avoid being affected by these trends in her professional or personal life.

The social aspects of nursing lie in the nurses' social situations which are Hydra-headed. There are the situations between the nurse and her patient, the nurse and the family, the nurse and the friends, the nurse and the doctor, the nurse and the supervisory staff, the nurse and the specialised hospital departments, and specialists. Complicating this is the complex interaction of the Nursing Team composed of the professional nurse, the practical nurse, the nursing student, the auxiliary helpers and others who work together for the total nursing care of each patient. Again as the patients change, the nurse-patient situation changes. The nurse encounters still a different situation when she meets her own family and friends and others outside the profession.

Her efficiency or otherwise will bear a direct relation to the "Give and Take" in the Nurse/Staff situation and the Nurse/Patient situation.

I have tried to give a very brief idea of this increasingly complicating and challenging situation in which the professional nurse finds herself today, and in which our students are being educated and trained. And I repeat *we have tended to ignore it*. I say this because we have not made any perceptible change in our education for Nursing to face and meet the needs of our people. We tend to suppress the potential qualities of leadership rather than foster them; we tend to isolate ourselves and our students from true citizenship which is self-directive and self-dependent.

We educators need to socialise nursing, and nurses need to socialise and be true citizens. Right from the day a student comes in her nursing education we need to point out, emphasise and re-emphasise that just as she or he has a home and family, friends in a community and just as they feel and think differently, have different customs and modes, so also every patient whom they care for and help towards self-help. No patient is in a vacuum by himself. Her thinking needs to be guided into these channels so that her very approach is conditioned to this background. This will make it so much more comfortable for the patients and so exciting for her as she gets a deeper insight into her work.

These broad sociological aspects need to be considered throughout her training. For this a sound social-psychology background is absolutely essential. The modern concept of nursing is the multi-purpose nurse or the public health nurse, and public health nursing is socialised nursing and medicine. Our very approach in the work whether it is in the home visit or the Family Welfare Centre or V.D. or T.B. Clinics, is humanistic and

This is one of the five papers presented through the last Conference Symposium—"The Social Aspect of Nursing". We hope to publish some of the other papers when they become available.—Editor

social. I feel that this same approach can very easily be followed by the hospital workers. In the Diploma Schools we have started to integrate public health but to be effective, the integration should be continual.

I would like to emphasise the following social roles of the modern nurse:

1. **The Nurse as an Interpreter.** Man lives in a society with distinct cultures; we know there is no dearth of this in our country where there are very numerous smaller groups called subcultures. The nurse works in this atmosphere of subcultures, interpreting the hospital services, the incomprehensible hospital language, routines, strange and unfamiliar equipment to the patient and the family. A strange world made even more frightening by the fear created by illness.

2. **The Nurse and the Educator.** In our country society still sees the nurse as "a strong back and a weak mind doing the drudgery of caring for the sick". A strong back is, no doubt of use in nursing but today society demands much more. With the advance in medical technology, quantity and the quality, there is a sharper line between people who know and those who do not. To bridge this gap, to make knowledge of illness and health more readily available and useful, the nurse must increasingly become a teacher of health. Here she helps in the readjustments of health values in the whole values system, and broadening the knowledge of health practices.

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