

Public Health

The Role of the Health Visitor

By

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This article is particularly intended for all Health Visitors in appreciation of their valuable contribution of the past, their co-operation for the present and their faithful and loyal support for the future in our country's endeavour for better health for the citizens of India.

The name Health Visitor clearly indicates that she is a Health Missionary who is prepared to tread the path of difficulties with courage and enthusiasm in order to carry the torch of the gospel of health from person to person, house to house and from village to village irrespective of caste, colour, creed, or political belief. Her primary duties include visiting the people in their homes, care of expectant and nursing mothers, care of young children, prevention of the spread of infection, vaccination and immunization, treatment of minor ailments, training and supervision of *dais*, keeping of records and health education. These duties vary widely in different parts of the country depending upon the funds available, health needs of the people, the educational standard of women, and the policies of the employing authorities. The Health Visitor is considered as a pioneer in the health programme of the Community and has surmounted innumerable difficulties in urban and rural areas in order to reach her goal which always remain as a wide horizon. Though she has varied functions to fulfil, her main work in the past was centered around maternal and child welfare activities. She acted as a pivot on whom a major portion of the health programme revolved.

At present with rapid and consistent change in the development of our

Country in education, health, industry, social welfare, agriculture etc., many more functions are expected of her for a comprehensive health programme covering environmental, personal, family and community health services. In some of the countries of the West where public health services are well established, one can visualise the evolutionary and revolutionary changes both the health programme and the training of the health personnel have undergone to meet the health needs of the people. As we in India also established our health services on similar lines, they are bound to be changed and expanded to keep pace with the progress of India on her onward march. Consequently we see that in training schools for nurses, health visitors, midwives and so on, more and more emphasis is put on preventive medicine and the social aspects of disease than on mere curative services. The Health Visitor of the present is expected to cover many more spheres of activities than in the past. Her functions are widened to cover School Health Services, Family Planning, Research and Health Education in all its aspects such as food, sanitation, control of pests, industrial hazards etc. She plays the role of a consultant in maternal and child health services, a technical assistant in the family planning clinics, a friend of the family and a valuable member of the health team.

With the introduction of Public Health into the basic nursing course, the Health Visitors still have a definite role to play and would be happy to welcome another band of health workers in the combined preventive and curative services. Under-

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standing and appreciating each others problems would help both groups as an asset to each other in most of the planning and working situations. As prevention of disease essentially depends on the cure of it, it is rather regrettable that the Health Visitors are not prepared for this important service at present. But nevertheless it is gratifying to note that the Government has recognised the valuable contribution the Health Visitors have made in the past and that it has encouraged the training of large number of Health Visitors to meet the health needs of the country.

Considering the role of the Health Visitor in the past, her contribution of the present and her definite place in the future, I am sure that the Health Visitors of today will challenge unlimited opportunities of service in the building and shaping of New India.

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