

Ward Clerks' Contribution Towards the Care of Patients

By

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The constant cry that "India needs more nurses to take care of her suffering millions" cannot be ignored—either by the nurses themselves or by the Governments concerned. Every citizen has a right to be taken care of and given facilities for preventive and positive health. But who is to meet this ever growing demand? Are not nurses themselves responsible to a great extent? You may ask "How can we cope with extra work when already our hands are full and institutions are so under-staffed?" There are ways and means to help the situation. I say this boldly, because the majority of nurses spend most of their valuable time in carrying out non-professional or non-nursing tasks—thus denying patients their rightful measure of care.

The time has come for us to think seriously about avenues we can explore in our hospital administration that will give the best possible care to our patients and allow for effective utilization of the present staff. One great improvement I can think of is to relieve nurses of unnecessary clerical work which could be carried out equally well by non-nursing staff *e.g.*, ward clerks or attenders. The appointment of ward clerks will be a real asset to the sister or nurse in charge of the ward. I have worked as a ward sister for 6 years and can say with sincerity that with the appointment of ward clerks in our hospital the sisters have found more time to devote to student supervision, teaching and patient care. Hospital Committees may not agree with this suggestion and consider it unnecessary to appoint ward clerks, but they need to have the situation clarified and the benefits explained. It pays the

institution in the promotion of a better nursing service.

What are some of the tasks that can be delegated to the ward clerks? How are they recruited? What are their qualifications?

Qualifications.

1. *Educational* : Each institution would set its own standards for its employees. Minimum education should be 5th or 6th form passed, with a fairly good knowledge of English.

2. *Physical* : Have good health determined on the basis of a physical examination; absence of any serious physical handicaps.

3. *Personal* : Cleanliness, neatness and a good appearance, ability to co-operate with various individuals and groups, a willingness and capacity to adapt themselves to the supervision supplied by the hospital staff. (They will need a certain amount of health instructions and supervision).

Recruitment.

Appointed by the Nursing Superintendent. She should have the power to control their discipline.

Their duties must be clearly defined and recorded. The following functions can be assigned to them :—

1. Answering the telephone—receiving and delivering messages.

2. Directing visitors to patients' rooms.

3. *Requisitions.*

- (a) Indent—Stationary, diet and other supplies.

- (b) Taking linen accounts—clean, dirty, mending and replacement.

4. Receiving laboratory and X-ray reports and attaching to patients' charts.

5. Collect X-rays and old charts of readmitted patients.

6. Return X-rays and old charts of discharged patients.

7. Making out patients' charts—i.e., fixing the various sheets on the chart board.

8. Ruling of books—duty, report, assignment sheets, etc.

9. Filling census sheets.

10. Recording admissions and discharges of patients in the Ward Register.

11. Recording births and deaths.

12. Fill in discharge slips.

13. Checking of tanks.

14. Distributing mail to the patients, taking their letters to the hospital post box.

15. Sending requisitions to the social workers regarding poor patients.

16. Looking after the patients' library.

17. Collecting patients for ward prayers, ward teaching classes and health talks.

18. Help Ward Sister with linen and general inventories.

It should be well understood that all these tasks are done under the direct supervision of the Ward Sister and she is finally responsible for them.

Planned Orientation for Ward Clerks.

They should be told in a general way what their responsibilities will be. After employment they should be carefully instructed with regard to their duties. They should be introduced to their work and followed up, especially during the period immediately after appointment when adjustment is most difficult and they are most responsive to suggestions.

Each individual needs a different kind of instruction depending on his or her capacity to learn and past

experience, also the department in which one works—its routine and physical set up. During this period the hospital policies, and the workers' responsibilities towards them, should be thoroughly covered and clarified.

Appointment.

Temporary for two weeks or a month. Then appointment order is given if there is satisfaction on both sides. During this time, they may leave or be discharged.

Reports regarding Work and Conduct.

These should be written by Ward Sisters and sent in at the end of the trial period. After they are definitely appointed, a monthly report should be sent to the Nursing Superintendent.

Hours of Work.

8 hours a day with a day off weekly. 7-30 a.m.—12-30 p.m. and 3 p.m.—6 p.m.

This can be adjusted according to the convenience of the wards. One ward clerk can help in two wards depending on the nature of the work.

General relationship between Sister and Ward Clerk.

In our hospital the Sister represents the Hospital Management to her non-professional staff, and these workers to the Hospital Management. She interprets the hospital policies to them and helps to keep up a good standard of service. She maintains discipline, stimulates co-operative effort and good-will, and fosters harmonious working relationships. She stimulates other nurses also to help the ward clerks. The Sister encourages the workers to develop personally and vocationally. In so doing, the work on the wards is geared to run smoothly and efficiently providing satisfactions for all concerned: the doctors, patients, nurses and the non-professional staff.

To sum up—the ward clerk is an asset to the ward and is a useful member of the ward team.