

Ten Marks of Good Nursing

By

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The old lady looked quizzically at the eager young girl before her and said, "So, you are going to be a nurse, my dear? Well I've had many of them take care of me. A good nurse is an angel, but I've had some that were..." she paused, and with a twinkle in her eye she added "more akin to the devil! Be careful what kind of a nurse you are."

What kind of a nurse? What is good nursing?—Are we really giving our patients the very best nursing we can with the staff we have, or has our idea of nursing become so limited through shortage of staff and pressure of work, that even when more staff becomes available the quality of nursing care does not improve? Real satisfaction only comes from quality work. What are some of the important criteria of good nursing? Let us consider ten.

1. It transforms doctor's orders into action. Nurse and doctor work hand in hand. No nurse works without doctor's orders whether in the hospital, or home, where the orders are given for individual people; or in the public health field where orders are often standing orders, giving instructions what to do under certain conditions. Doctors and nurses need to work hand in hand. The doctor's orders can be considered the skeleton or framework on which the nursing care of each individual is built. But just as there is not much life in the bony framework of the body without muscles and nerves, blood vessels, organs and skin, so nursing that is just checking the doctor's orders is hardly to be called nursing. It must have so much more to be of professional calibre.

If then the doctor's orders are the skeleton of good nursing care, to what essentials must we pay attention in

following these orders? In the first place they should be faithfully and accurately carried out. The nurse should understand the purpose of these orders and so carry them out that the purpose is met. This sounds so simple. Every nurse says to herself, of course I do that, but have you not known the rectal glucose expelled, or the cold sponge that did not bring down the fever, or the special diet served that the patient did not eat? To meet our responsibility, all doctor's orders must be carried out intelligently, accurately, with good technique, and on time.

2. The patient benefits from the greatest possible degree of comfort. Rest is basic to recovery of health. The power of the human body to fight disease and heal is one of God's great gifts to us. Long ago a wise man of science said, "Man treats, God cures." Rest speeds recovery in almost every case, and for real rest the greatest possible degree of comfort is essential. Who can relax when they are not comfortable?

Good nursing means the patient is provided with the greatest possible degree of comfort. To some extent this is done through the wise use of special equipment like air rings, pillows, back rests, rubber mattresses and so on. The patient's position is changed. Weary muscles are rested by rubbing. Careful handling, skillfully done dressings and treatments, the prevention and reduction of pain in every way are a sign of good nursing care.

3. All the requirements of the patient for good personal hygiene are adequately met. No doctor's order is required for the nurse to meet the hygienic needs of the patient. She may consult the doctor when the patient's condition is such that she

wishes his advice, as before undertaking the shampoo for a woman with serious heart disease, but the daily health habits of the patients in our hospital beds are in our hands. It is the responsibility of nurses to provide for the patient adequate baths, opportunities to wash their hands after using the bedpan, and before meals, care for their teeth, nails, hair and skin. The nurse sees that the fluid intake is adequate, and elimination regular. Rest and sleep are encouraged by quiet and definite rest times. Proper clothing and proper bedding increase comfort and ensure the patient is not too hot or too cold. In this field of personal hygiene of the patient, the difference between a good nurse, and a mediocre one shows up clearly. The good nurse takes the initiative and provides for her patient's good, the other meets the patient's demands. If he wants his bath with his clothes on, or says nothing about washing his hands before he eats, the poor nurse rushes on glad not to spend time she does not have on things the importance of which she fails to realize. Yet good hygiene is the very essence of good nursing.

4. The patient is provided with optimum nutrition in the light of his condition. Nutrition can be considered as part of the hygiene of the patient, but so important is it that a special point must be made of it. A doctor, making a study of hospital diets, looked earnestly at a group of nurses one day and said, "*Patients are actually suffering from malnutrition in our hospitals. Recovery is delayed by starvation.*" With an increasing understanding in the field of diet therapy, and the need for high protein after surgery and high fever, the widespread implications of such a challenge startle us. The attractive service of the patient's diet, the encouraging of the patient to consume it, and the accurate recording and reporting of what is actually eaten, are nursing responsibilities. Who

serves the diet in your wards? Are they attractive? Does the woman with anaemia understand and eat the greens; and the man with the fractured leg drink his milk? Does the patient who needs to be fed stop sooner than he should because he does not want to take the time of the busy nurse feeding him? If any diets are brought in from outside, is adequate supervision given, to ensure that the patient is actually eating enough of the right things? Where hospital Dietetians or Diet Sisters exist, nurses should be working with them, hand in hand. In many hospitals no dietitians exist and this challenge remains unmet but for the efforts of nurses supported by doctors.

5. The environment of the patient is made to contribute as much as possible to the patient's recovery. Environmental hygiene as well as personal hygiene is an important responsibility of the nurse. Cleanliness of the wards, and everything that comes in contact with the patient, is important to the nurse. Others do much of the actual cleaning, but it is the responsibility of the nurse to see that real cleanliness exists. From patient's beds, bedside tables, dishes and medicine glasses to baths, latrines, floors, and windows, cleanliness is essential.

Order and an atmosphere of quiet pleasant efficiency do much to contribute to the patient's recovery. This atmosphere is indeed a mark of good nursing. It is a sad comment on the nursing service of an institution when a patient reports, "*It was the screaming I could not stand. The sister screams at the staff, and the student, and the ayah and the sweeper, and they all scream too.*" In a place where such is the case nurses undermine the respect that is due to their profession. Control over a situation comes from one's own ability, not a loud voice.

Lighting, temperature and ventilation, as well as beauty factors, are all

part of the environment in the hands of the nurse. Limits are set by climate and buildings but the nurse's skill is shown in the use she makes of the facilities at her disposal. The real skill of the nurse shows up most clearly under difficult situations.

6. The safety of the patient is assured by good nursing care. How essential this is, and how chagrined nurses should be when the sad evidence of failure condemns us. Sometimes noticed, sometimes almost unnoticed, some patients in hospitals still suffer from cross infection, septic wounds, bed sores, hot water bottle burns, injuries from falls, and many tragedies which mark the nursing as inadequate. Often such is the result of too great responsibility left to those ill prepared to carry it or too few nurses for too much work. Nurses must feel the responsibility for the safety of their patients, insist on proper sterilization of supplies, instruments and syringes, hand washing facilities and at least minimum equipment for safe patient care. Possible dangers foreseen and prevented, perfect sterile technique, steady uncomplicated patient progress, mark good nursing.

7. A good nurse uses her supplies and her time to the best advantage. Professional judgement as to the best use of time and supplies, develops slowly in the nurse during her days of training if she works under good teaching supervision. But alas! some fail to develop this judgement. We have the superficial slap-dash nurse who sees little to do and has much time to stand around; and the conscientious slow plodder who never gets done and is always including extras, and leaving undone essentials. The good nurse is always busy, plans her work well and uses good judgement in the use of her time.

Supplies are always limited. What is wasted cuts down what is available. The good nurse catches the running tap, the light left on when not needed,

large amounts of cotton foolishly used and carelessly discarded, bandages used as a rope, and all the other wasteful signs of poor use of supplies.

8. The mental and emotional needs of the patient are met as well as the physical needs. That man is not just body but mind and spirit as well, has long been recognised. Modern medicine is stressing the interdependence of mind and body. Nursing is not complete unless it takes part in providing the needs of the entire person. Therefore the good nurse plans to meet the psychological needs of the patient. Fundamental among these is his need for security. Confidence in the hospital, confidence in the doctor, and confidence in the nurse do much to create this sense of security. The professional bearing of the nurse, her understanding of the patient's needs, and her skill in helping the patient, rank the quality of her nursing in this field. The patient's need for diversion and recreation become urgent with long illness. Here too the good nurse is competent to guide and direct, teach and encourage the patient. By her skill often the days of illness are shortened.

9. Health teaching is provided. Man's interest in health is always keener when he loses it. Few things of such great value are cared for so little by most people, as their health. Therefore a hospital patient and his family are more receptive to health teaching than the average well person. As the nurse goes about her regular duties many opportunities are open to her to teach. By answers to questions, by her conversation while bathing the patient or making the bed, and by her own example, health teaching can be imparted. Modern nursing includes the building of health, and the prevention of disease, as well as the care of the sick. A good nurse is a health teacher. She is an enthusiastic one so full of her mission that she does not miss an opportunity, on duty or off, to help people to be more healthy.

10. Good nursing is individualized. It is planned to meet the needs of the individual person. Nursing is work with people. Each person in all this wide world is like others, and yet different from all others. Good nursing is planned for the individual person taking his background, cultural outlook, likes and dislikes, habits and intelligence into account. It must meet the needs of the disease but also of the person. No matter how big the institution, really good nursing care must take the individual into account.

We are living in a day characterized by co-operation. No longer are big projects accomplished by the individual alone. Working together is the key note of success in our time. Nursing too is becoming part of a team.

As this team grows, inter-relationships become more complex. Doctor, nurse, dietitian, technician, and social workers are already in action. The good nurse is one who can work well with others, contributing her own share and respecting and appreciating the contribution of others. Change comes fast. Good nursing requires constant professional growth. Keeping up with new developments, learning new techniques, it requires the best we have from each of us, and it brings to those who do it, satisfactions beyond description. Let us all do good nursing every day. If it is not possible to meet our goal in quality nursing today, let us make a plan for step by step progress from the situation as we face it in our own work today, to the goal we may hope to meet this year and next.

An Air Spreader

From the Clara Swain Hospital, Barielly, comes this useful suggestion.

When fans are few and far between, an air "spreader" is a good way to get greater distribution of the air from the fan. The Spreader may be made of any light weight material such as plywood.

