

Experiment in 8 hours' Duty for Night Nurses

By

B. Dawson

Nursing Superintendent

Lady Hardinge Medical College Hospital, New Delhi

In the present difficult working conditions in most hospitals, increasing attention is being given to the long working hours of the nurses on the one hand, and the shortage of staff and accommodation on the other.

With this great shortage of staff, (and lack of accommodation) to think even of shortening hours of duty would appear to be attempting the impossible. Yet attempts have been made to do this with the encouragement, and the co-operation of those who have the urge to improve the working conditions of nurses.

The experiment tried in this hospital, which is a training school for nurses, might serve as a guide to other similar hospitals.

A few points for note are given below :

1. The number of nurses on night duty remain the same, and these work for a month.
2. No matter how small the ward, there must be at least 4 nurses in the ward. One to be incharge who holds stock, and three others.
3. If there is a small ward, it should be considered a part of a large ward, with a co-operative interchange of nurses.
4. Two large wards with two sisters, two staff nurses and student nurses make one unit, so that one sister and one staff nurse remain in the unit all through the day.
5. The last and most important point is that the ward sister is given clear instructions and the authority, that, should the 3-30 p.m. to 11-00 p.m. shift nurse not come on duty at 3-30 p.m. due to unforeseen circumstances, she (the Ward Sister) must inform the Night Sister that she has requested the night

nurse to do 12 hours duty for that particular night.

This safeguard will be necessary till the wards are staffed according to the recommendations laid down in "*Report of the nursing committee to review conditions of service, emoluments, etc. of the nursing profession*" put out by the Govt. of India, Ministry of Health.

First Experiment.

The first experiment for 8 hours night duty for student nurses was tried in January, 1956, on the following lines :

All nursing personnel came on duty at 7 a.m. The students on "split duty" went off at 11 a.m., returned at 7-30 p.m. and worked till 11 p.m.

The rest of the students divided into two groups. **Group A** with Sister went off at 11-30 a.m. for lunch, returned at 12 noon and worked till 3-30 p.m.

Group B with the Staff nurse went off at 12 noon, returned at 3-30 p.m. and worked till 7-30 p.m. handing over to the nurse on split duty. The nurse on split duty handed over the charge to the night nurse at 11 p.m., and the duty of the night nurse continued till 7 a.m. i.e., a period of 8 hours.

Groups A and B did afternoon and evening duty alternatively and the nurse on split duty worked for one week.

Disadvantage of Plan.

This plan had one disadvantage, in that the nurse on split duty went off after 11 p.m., and still had to get up the following morning at 5 or 5-30 a.m. to be on duty at 7 a.m. The evening shift nurse thus only had about 6 hours sleep a night for one week continuously.

Second Experiment.

The second experiment was started in

July, 1957, and is working satisfactorily.

The day and night staff do the usual duties as previously stated except that the student nurse on split duty now does a straight shift 3-30 p.m. to 11 p.m. thus ensuring that she gets a proper and full night's rest. The student nurse on straight shift duty changes weekly.

On change day there are two student nurses less in the morning, because the nurse coming off "straight shift" has a day off and the nurse to commence *straight shift* does not come on till 3-30 p.m. and continues to 11 p.m.

Change day is not the same in all the wards, as this will depend on the admission and operation days of each ward. The Student nurses now have 2 days off a month; one day off if of their choice and one when they change shifts; this is in addition to morning or evening half day on Sunday.

Unfortunately the trained staff have to continue 12 hours night duty, due to shortage of staff. One extra staff nurse is put on night to relieve them so that each one may have one night off a

week and one late night a month.

(Note: "Late night" means that the staff nurse comes on duty at 2 a.m. instead of 7-30 p.m.)

Means of Achieving the Change :

A meeting was called of all the ward sisters, to explain the aims and ways of carrying out such a plan, as its success would depend on their co-operation; and their co-operation was given wholeheartedly.

The first plan was carried out by all the wards together. For the second plan, two wards were selected for a trial period. When it appeared that the plan would work satisfactorily, it was extended to the other wards.

Because of the special needs of some wards, such as Gynaecology, Acute Surgery and Maternity, only the senior students in these wards are detailed for the straight shift of 3-30 p.m. to 11 p.m.

The actual number of nurses in each ward on duty, depends, of course, on the type and pressure of activities; but the plan as described need not be disturbed by a change in numbers.

Duty Schedule for 24 Hours in Wards with 30 to 50 Beds

	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	am	am	am	am	am	noon	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	am	am	am	am	am	am	am
Group A & B Change Alt. days																									
Group A																									
Sister																									
Student Sr.																									
Student Sr. or Jr.																									
Student Jr.																									
Group B																									
Staff Nurse																									
Student Sr.																									
Student Sr. or Jr.																									
Student Jr.																									
Weekly Change :																									
Shift Student Nurse																									
Monthly Change :																									
Night Student Nurse																									