

# **PUBLIC HEALTH**

## **Health Education**

By

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*Health education has been defined as "not only instruction in purely health matters, but includes also those activities which are likely to influence favourably health knowledge, health attitudes and health habits of an individual. Health education must promote health and health consciousness".*

To enjoy life at its fullest capacity means abundant life, indicated not only by the mere absence of disease in a person, but by the harmonious functioning of body, mind, and spirit in relation to the immediate surroundings physically and psychologically. The World Health Organization early at its inception declared "Health" as the *fundamental right of all human beings* and today we see various agencies of W.H.O. focussing their attention to the attainment of the highest possible standard of health. Fullness of life and abundant energy can be maintained if people will observe the facts and principles of health and of healthful living. Hitherto people were taught mainly in how to recover health when lost, in other words to find a cure for disease. Recovering from illness is necessary, but a knowledge of the prevention of disease is of greater importance in achieving positive health. With the increasing emphasis on the training of the nurse to take her place as a Health Educator and co-ordinator of other agencies concentrating on health, it is hoped that a greater number of people can be stirred to an awareness of health needs in order to appreciate good health by arousing interests in the facts and principles of good hygienic living. If these are to be accomplished the nurse herself should be interested in positive health and should be a symbol of health attitudes, health habits and behaviours. Health education is a continuous process and the nurse as an important member of

the health team can be of invaluable service in the health campaign either in the hospital or outside. The nurses role as a health educator can be seen in the following categories of service.

### **1. The Nurse and Health Education in the Hospital.**

The hospital is essentially the place where the sick are cared for, helping them to regain the health that is lost. In the different units of the hospital we find people in varying stages of health anxiously looking forward to regarding full strength and vitality. This is the time when they are in desperate need of health and hence receptive to help and advice. If this time is properly utilised the patients can learn effectively as the subject presented would have meaning and significance. The nurse must use her judgement in selecting the individual patient and the appropriate material to be presented. If the seeds of health are sown in each of the patients, the fruits they bear will be significant in days to come when neither they, their family members, nor friends will suffer from the same disease or disability. The hospital can take the place of a community Health Centre in catering to the health needs of the people it serves. Since it is not possible at present to visit all mothers in their own homes, health education can be effectively carried out in the maternity wards where the mothers can be taught the principles and management of breast feeding, general care of the new born, prevention and treatment of minor ailments, impor-

tance of nutrition, importance of attending welfare clinics etc. Similarly patients in the medical unit, pediatric unit, infectious diseases unit etc. can get the benefit of health education if the material presented coincides with time, season and the individual concerned. Group teaching can also be done if there are patients of the same disease in a particular ward. Besides attending to the physical needs of the patients, opportunities should be provided to meet the psychological and spiritual needs as well. The patients should be encouraged to express themselves in order to be eased of tensions so that they can respond to treatment effectively and adequately. It is the nurse more than any one else who can help in this psychological aspect if she listens to her patients with sympathy and tries to understand their anxieties. An in-service programme for the maintenance staff, together with physical check-up and immunization against the various preventable diseases, and early medical treatment at the time of sickness, will help greatly in the promotion and maintenance of health. The importance of the out-patient department in the health education programme should receive due attention. The various clinics in the out-patient department can function as health clinics. The nurse working in this department can participate in the education campaign by individual or group teaching, distribution of literature to those who are able to read, demonstrations, use of black board, lantern lectures etc.

## 2. Health Education in the Home.

Public Health Nurses and Health Visitors specially privileged of visiting the homes will understand just how

much the family will be looking forward to their visits. The nurse in the home with her additional knowledge of acceptable behaviour, courteous and gentle manners together with other qualities is looked upon as a Friend, Councillor and Teacher.

In the home she can impart the knowledge as to

- (1) the care of young children in health,
- (2) the care of persons suffering from illness,
- (3) the care to prevent the occurrence and the spread of infection,
- (4) care to prevent accidents,
- (5) care and health supervision of the expectant and nursing mothers and
- (6) care of the aged enabling them to make adequate adjustment in the changed pattern of life.

The nurse in the home will appreciate very much the value of imparting the knowledge of health to the family in its total environments socially and economically. Health education in the home will help the family to make the best use of the community resources in the promotion, protection and maintenance of health. It can help parents to make their valuable contribution to the family members through better understanding of each other, spiritual and moral relationships, wise use of time, leisure and recreation, legal responsibility to children, and their co-operation, efforts and participation for the success of a democratic society.

*(To be continued in February)*

