

House Keeping in Hospitals

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The word Housekeeping originated from the meaning : 'The Art of keeping House'. In the ancient households and even now, the Housekeeper occupied a position next to the Mistress and was virtually the representative of her Mistress.

Nursing itself was considered as an household art for many centuries. The care of the sick was the duty of the housewife as was cooking, serving and cleaning. In the early 19th century, Pastor Fliedner and his wife in Kaiserwerth, Germany, started a Training Centre for deaconess nurses who could work with other women. The time table for their study was fixed around three divisions :—

Cooking and housekeeping
Laundry and linen, and
Women's wards.

Thus they got formal instruction in both practical nursing and religious doctrines. Florence Nightingale attended that school and obtained from it her ability to organize housekeeping, laundry, linen service and nursing care. On the battlefield of the Crimea, she brought order out of chaos. When she organized her school of nursing at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, she made sure that her students learned housekeeping. Today we do not waste student nurses' time in scrubbing floors and washing windows. We desire to have a separate Housekeeper with special training, who, with her staff, should take care of the cleanliness in the hospital.

Importance of Good Housekeeping in relation to the care of the sick.

The objective of housekeeping in the hospital is to keep the hospital clean and in first class condition, healthful and safe within the limited funds available. A hospital differs from any other residence in that its guests are ill, and often in bed. Cleaning their environment is entirely

different. Medical and Nursing Sciences can function best if the patient is surrounded by a clean, sanitary and pleasant environment. A pleasant hygienic atmosphere contributes a good deal towards recovery.

Housekeeping is a complex activity requiring constant attention to many different details. It is a thankless job in which dusting, scrubbing, wall washing are tiresome, trying, but essential activities. It is not in any way a spectacular part of the organization. A clean, well kept and orderly hospital is a condition taken for granted by the public. They seldom realise that it is the housekeeping that makes the hospital livable. Housekeeping is a basic necessity of any hospital administration.

Functions of Hospital Housekeeping.

It is not possible to set up an outline standard of functions for all hospitals because each hospital is different from the other, larger or smaller; run by Government, Municipal or District Boards, or private funds; sanatorium, urban, suburban or rural, antiquated and modern, and every hospital has its own priorities for functions. The following are however some common functions :

1. Supervision of general household cleaning throughout the entire physical plant : wards, private rooms, halls, verandahs, lobbies, offices, staff quarters, administration quarters, personnel quarters.
2. General supervision of laundry and linen rooms.
3. Transportation of soiled and clean linen throughout the institution.
4. Requisitioning and distribution of the necessary household cleaning supplies.

5. Cleaning of porches, sidewalks, entrances and compound.
6. Care of furniture and requisitioning of furniture repairs.
7. Requisitioning of linen and supervision of their service and mending.
8. Distribution of ice, fans, and removal of institutional refuse.
9. Maintenance of various inventories of supplies and preparation of reports of performances.
10. Employment of the domestic personnel and allocation of their duties.
11. Physical cleanliness of the institution in order.
 - (a) To maintain asepsis and to avoid contamination and spread of disease.
 - (b) To prevent and destroy pests. (In India it is a very important duty.)
12. Supervision of ayahs, ward boys, sweepers and dhobis.
13. Several functions incident to the above are :
 - Control of noise.
 - Conserving heat and electricity.
 - Promotion of safety measures by observing and reporting on sundry dangerous conditions like tripping hazards and fraying electric cords and broken furniture.
14. Development of goodwill and harmonious relationships by courteous, cheerful and unobtrusive methods of working with patients, visitors and colleagues, employees and other departments.
15. Interior decorations, and special arrangements in connection with festivals etc.

The emphasis should be on the human factor in all these duties — allowing happiness to radiate all around.

Qualities of the Housekeeper.

1. *Educational Background* :— Many colleges offer courses in household economy, domestic science and institutional household management for training women in housekeeping.

Nurses can have these instructions if they can afford them.

2. *Experience* :— A thorough ground work in practical problems and practical experience are absolutely necessary. The housekeeper must know her job. She must be an organizer, thinker, and have the ability to meet problems, surmount obstacles. She must be able to select and train workers. She must know her materials, soaps, brushes, lotions etc; how to procure them and what substitutes can be used. When not available or beyond the funds, the most economical answer to linen, decorating and maintenance problems must be found.

Personality Traits.

1. Strong aversion to uncleanness and disorder.
2. Must know how to work with other people including her superiors, helpers and other departments.
3. Must be able to delegate responsibilities.
4. Work cautiously with a clear picture of organization in mind, with knowledge of each job, with determination to stick to budget and a desire to work as a team.
5. Must maintain a close connection between the maintenance departments (P.W.D.) and herself — because, only if the walls are in good condition, the housekeeper will be inspired

to clean them, to put forth her best efforts.

Who is the Housekeeper in the Hospitals?

Nurse? It is a dreadful waste of her training. She is needed elsewhere — but until we have specialised jobs created, nurses and matrons will have to carry on the work.

Large Hospitals have assistants to help in the laundry with linen collection, distribution and repair, and in general supervision.

Essentials of Good Housekeeping.

1. Careful working schedules and job analyses.
2. Importance of hourly and daily supervision.
3. Detailed housekeeping service manual should be compiled.
4. Plan the day's routine—If short of help, arrange for the work which is absolutely essential, such as linen distribution, garbage collection and office room care. In this, ability to combine works is necessary.
5. Fix regular inspection hours such as: 7 A.M., 9 A.M., 11 A.M., 1 P.M., and 4 P.M.
6. Fix definite hours for distribution of supplies — soap etc. This will help in cutting down time and energy.
7. Number each job and prepare a job analysis for it *e.g.*,
 Cleaning Wards.
 Cleaning personnel quarters.
 Cleaning lavatories.
 Cleaning private rooms.
 Cleaning Walls.
 Cleaning furniture.
 Cleaning windows.
 Heavy lifting.
 Rearrangement of beds, furniture, equipment.
 Garbage removal.
 Ice distribution.

8. Prepare schedules for collection and distribution of the supplies.

9. Find out which are the best methods of doing certain things *e.g.*,

Washing windows—

- (1) by outside contractor
- (2) Employing window cleaners permanently.

or

- (3) Making each ward boy responsible for the windows in the ward.

Procedures.

Requisition for supplies, for repairs are made and sent to the officer concerned: Hospital Superintendent, Administrator or Nursing Superintendent. Many hospitals send patients' Discharge slips to the Housekeeper for making up the bed and preparing room etc. for next patient. This is very important because of shortage of bed linen.

Aids in efficient working.

Labour saving—mechanical household devices are very useful. Servants must have definite instruction in handling and caring for them.

Carefully worked out cleaning formulæ is needed; methods of cleaning should be established. Our ayahs and ward boys do not understand the principles of hygiene and cleaning and they need instructions and demonstrations to help and guide them. They should be closely supervised in this respect.

Carefully selected equipment is very important in the efficient functioning of the housekeeping department.

The Linen Room. (*if in charge of the Housekeeper*)

The following functions are carried out in the linen room:

Acquisition and issuance of new linen.

Daily exchange of clean linen for soiled.

Proper marking of new linen, general routine mending and plain sewing — (place your whole interest in it). Methods for acquisition and distribution of linen.

Marking — date all pieces so as to check life of goods. Distinctive marks for ward, private, staff and service.

Distinctive border designs for these to aid in sorting. Ideally 4 parts *i.e.*, in use, in store, in linen room, with laundry. Complete inventory of all linen in central and individual units.

Test checks of *all* inventories from time to time.

Laundry — attached to Hospital

Stores given by housekeeper to dhobi.

Sterilize the infected linen before putting them through washing processes. Facilities for sterilizing purposes are essential *e.g.*, deep sinks for soaking linen and large autoclave for mattresses.

Formulae for stain removal — other washing.

Use tested chemicals and give instructions regarding strengths to be used and time for soaking linen etc.

General Points.

1. All the supplies should be kept in specific storage places. The shelves should be labeled and the arrangement of the articles should be systematic.

2. It will be very difficult to supervise all the personnel at all times. Successful administration depends much upon the head's ability to "get along" with a great variety of personalities, sometimes coupled to subnormal mentalities.

Much time, money and energy could be saved through a complete analysis of workers' jobs, so that all might understand their specific duties. Workers should not be called here, there and everywhere to do any job.

Orders should come only from the department head or assistant.

Maintaining the Personnel.

The provision of proper housing, recreational facilities and a livable wage, increase incentives; promotions, good food, systematic performances and a high respect as an individual can eliminate frequent change of personnel. The training given *e.g.*, in painting, washing, handling machines, polishing, purchasing and handling of supplies, inspires the employees to improve their work, promotes permanence and thus reduces cost.

Teaching. (the employees)

1. Take one point at a time and strike it hard.
2. Treat the employee as an individual — Do not admonish them in the presence of others.
3. Have a direct approach — Start with something that is near and dear to them.
4. Have a positive approach and show you are interested in their work.

The equipment and supplies used in the housekeeping functions do not directly affect the patient's care in the same way as the surgical supplies, medicine and diet. Therefore they receive less attention. Nevertheless, they affect significantly the happiness of the patient while he stays in the hospital by affording contentment and pleasantness and an understanding and appreciation of hygienic surroundings. The impression gained of any hospital is greatly influenced by the quality of its housekeeping.

The success of a hospital is judged not merely by the professional services given by doctors and nurses but also by the food served and the cleanliness and upkeep of the institution. A clean house signifies good management — a dirty one bad management. Good housekeeping and good laundering are very important factors in building the status of a hospital and go hand in hand with good nursing service.