

The Health Visitors Page

The Basic Training of the Public Health Nurse

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In discussing the present basic training of the public health nurse, I should like to start with a brief review of the factors which produced the public health nurse, since these have had great influence on the form which present types of preparation have taken.

Public health nursing has two sources: Preventive medicine and visiting nursing. Preventive medicine in the modern sense of the word is a product of the 19th century when scientific and social progress were revolutionising our concepts in many fields. It began with the emphasis on the importance of good environmental sanitation in the prevention of disease. However it was not until the end of the 19th century that we realized that, although environment may be a vehicle of transfer, the cause of many diseases is a germ. The work of Pasteur, Koch and others in the field of Bacteriology gave us this knowledge. Research in nutrition, internal medicine, and many other fields brought us a tremendous and constantly growing fund of scientific facts concerning the prevention of disease and the promotion of health.

The first World War showed that scientific knowledge alone, however complete, is not enough to prevent disease and physical defects. A large percentage of recruits for the army had to be rejected because of defects *which could have been prevented if something had been done about them earlier.* We learned then that scientific knowledge must be put into the hands of the people and utilized by them if disease is to be controlled. Also, scientists must be kept informed of the health problems of the community. Some worker had to be found to act as a link between the research laboratory and the community, to carry health teaching to the people and to report community health needs to the scientists and doctors. It was the visiting nurse who was chosen as the most suitable person for this vital work.

Visiting nursing that is, beside nursing in the home on a visiting basis—began many centuries ago with the early Christian deaconesses. Its modern development started in Liverpool in the middle of the 19th century when through the interest of William Rathbone, a trained nurse named Mary Robinson began to visit and care for the sick poor in their homes. The work of the visiting nurses of this era was completely curative in emphasis, and their preparation for it was the full training in hospital nursing with later training in techniques suitable to the home. When health teaching became an additional responsibility of the visiting nurse, preparation for this was added in the special course which the hospital nurse took after her basic training. Thus we have the pattern set for public health nursing training as:

(a) a hospital course of three or more years, followed by
(b) a course in public health nursing, usually about 9 months duration. This is still a common pattern in England, Canada and the United States.

Another type of preparation has evolved in many of the European countries and in certain of the better schools of nursing in Canada and the United States for which two factors have been particularly important. One is the growth of interest in the prevention of disease, together with the realisation that the promotion of health, the prevention and the cure of disease are interrelated parts of a larger whole and that they cannot be separated in practice. If the people of the community, for whom health work exists are to be cared for adequately, each of these parts must receive due attention.

The other factor was the situation in Europe after the first World War. Countries were ravaged, disease widespread, money for health work insufficient, and trained medical and nursing personnel inadequate. A solution seemed to be the prevention of as much disease as possible so that trained personnel would be more adequate to care for all, including those whose illness could not be prevented. Therefore, schools for medical workers including those for nurses gave preparation for the promotion of health and the prevention of disease as well as for the cure of disease during the undergraduate course. Thus a new, more efficient, and more logical pattern of training was set for public health nursing.

Before discussing basic training in more detail, I should like to list briefly a few of the most important elements which make up the public health aspect of nursing. These must be included in any type of training for this branch of nursing:

1. Ability to deal with *people as individuals* rather than as "cases" or "bed numbers", and realisation of the importance of individual care.
2. Understanding of community relationships. This includes:
 - a. Understanding of the influence of the family upon the individual, and of the relation of social and economic factors to health and disease.
 - b. Knowledge of the value and functions of community health and social agencies, including the hospital as a community health center, and ability to use these agencies in providing complete care for the individual and his family.
3. Knowledge of the subject matter upon which health teaching is based and the ability to teach it to all kinds of people in all situations. This subject matter is broad. It includes:
 - a. How the normal body develops and functions.
 - b. What constitutes good physical, mental, and environmental hygiene and why.
 - c. Nutrition: suitable protective diets different age groups

and different incomes, proper methods of cooking, and budgeting.

- d. Defenses of the body against infection and immunity.
- e. Early signs and symptoms of deviations from health.
- 4. Understanding of the public health field :
 - a. The scope of public health services including public health nursing, and their importance in a comprehensive health programme.
 - b. The characteristics of the community and the country as a whole in respect to health and disease.
 - c. The special problems of health promotion and disease prevention in the community and country, for all age groups.

The curricula of the two types of course preparing for public health nursing may now be considered. In the first type, the hospital course is followed by a separate course in public health nursing. Often, but not always, a certain amount of public health emphasis is inculcated during the hospital training, during practice on the wards and in out-patient clinics, and by arranging an affiliation of 2 weeks to 2 months with a public health agency. The actual public health nursing course is usually given at a college or university unrelated to the hospital school. The student has supervised practical work with a public health agency and theoretical courses including.

- 1. Public health nursing history, organisation, and methods.
- 2. Special fields of public health nursing, Maternity and child welfare, school and industrial hygiene, Tuberculosis and Venereal disease, etc.
- 3. Public health administration.
- 4. Microbiology and preventive medicine.
- 5. Methods of health teaching.
- 6. Sociology and social work.
- 7. Nutrition.
- 8. Mental Hygiene.

The weaknesses of this type of preparation are :

1. Sickness and abnormality are emphasized in the hospital course *before* health and the normal individual are emphasised in the public health course. Thus the student's attention is likely to become fixed to too great an extent upon the curative part of the wide field of health.

2. Preparation in each of the three parts of the field of health is "pigeon holed". For example, the student learns the curative aspects of Tuberculosis in her hospital course, and very much later in her public health course she learns the factors which promote health and those which must be considered in the prevention of Tuberculosis. In practice, the different points should be learned in a related fashion if the nurse is to deal adequately with actual people who have Tuberculosis. From the point of view of education, learning would be more efficient if all aspects were studied at the same time.

These weaknesses are corrected in the second type of course, in which preparation for both curative and public health nursing is given at the same time from the beginning of the basic undergraduate course. This plan takes into consideration the fact that all parts of the field of health are equally important and that they all concern the nurse whether she works in hospital or public health agency. The length of this type of course varies from three years in some European schools to four or five years in University schools giving a degree in nursing. Thirty-nine months is probably the minimum length for satisfactory preparation.

There are three different ways in which public health nursing preparation is brought into the nurse's training:

1. Through organized courses and practice *mainly* concerned with public health nursing. These include:

- a. Social science (Community organization and the family)
- b. Microbiology and preventive medicine
- c. Community health and sanitation
- d. Normal nutrition
- e. Social case work
- f. Principles and practice of public health nursing including its special fields
- g. Principles and practice of health teaching.
- h. Public health administration.

2. Through organized courses and practice *partly* concerned with public health nursing. These include:

- a. Biological sciences (Anatomy, physiology and biochemistry)
- b. Psychology mental health, psychiatry and psychiatric nursing.
- c. Medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics, including their special fields and related nursing.
- d. Nursing and the social order (history of nursing professional problems, etc.).

3. Through public health nursing emphasis pervading all aspects of the whole undergraduate training. Some of the important things here are:

- a. Attention to students' living and working conditions.
- b. Emphasis in the study of any condition on the normal first, from which the abnormal is a variation.
- c. Discussion of the preventive aspects of all diseases at the time each disease is being studied.
- d. Consideration of the patient as a person and as a member of the family and community.
- e. Encouragement of health teaching.
- f. Emphasis on adequate nutrition, mental hygiene, eye health, etc. for all.
- g. Knowledge and use of community resources.

In addition to a planned curriculum, there are two special needs for the introduction of public health nursing into the basic

training: good practice field, and an interested teaching staff some of whom have enough special training and experience in public health nursing to qualify them to teach it. Nurses with this training are not readily available in India today. However, as other reports have pointed out, there are many places where public health can be introduced in the present training if an effort is made to see and use them. Even a small start would prepare for larger efforts when more qualified staff and better organized practice fields are available later. Therefore let us begin now to plant some seeds of public health nursing in the training schools, from which greater things may develop. (Given by Miss Corwen at *T.N.A.I. Annual Conference*. Nov. 1945.)

Films will Help to Train The Student Nurse

Film of the documentary and instructional type, are beginning to play an important part in creating publicity for the nursing profession as well as forming a valuable means of supplementary training for the student nurse.

In the past the nursing profession, and its enviable history of achievement and good work, has not been brought to the public eye nearly as much as it should be, and until recently no real outstanding effort has been made to produce a documentary film entirely devoted to the nursing profession. By the end of this year, however, thousands of film-goers will have seen "Student Nurse," the documentary made for the British Council, which follows the progress of the student nurse from early probationer days through the three years training to the happy day when she can say she is a State Registered Nurse.

Actual scenes in the casualty wards, operating theatre, general and surgical wards, unconventional sidelights on the social life of the student nurse have made this film so popular with those who have already seen it that it should be followed up by others dealing with the more specialised branches of the qualified nurse's work. A well-produced film with its unlimited scope for action pictures and snappy commentary has all the appeal of a popular illustrated magazine with the added attraction of being alive, thus giving the audience a feeling of being on the scene rather than just reading an article.

Apart from films made for public showing, which aim, naturally, at creating national interest in nursing and to attract the right type of newcomer to the profession, there is already available for training courses a big library of medical films which have been made during the past few years for showing to medical and nursing students. Many of these deal with subjects outside the scope of nursing but the greater majority will prove invaluable as supplementary courses of instruction and have the great feature of bringing to the lecture room the clear picturised results of researches, new cures and surgical treatments. Normally, this insight into the