

## Important Role of Psychiatric Nurse in Care of the Mentally Sick.

### First Meeting of the Expert Committee on Psychiatric Nursing Care of the World Health Organization.

THE PSYCHIATRIC NURSE ought to be a "guardian angel" and not a "guard." She should contribute not only to the care and cure of the mentally ill, but should help them to regain a place in normal life and help to prevent mental illness. The psychiatric nurse should receive an education and training which would make it possible for her to carry out these functions side by side with the psychiatrist.

These three ideas pervaded the discussion of the Expert Committee on Psychiatric Nursing of the World Health Organization which has just taken place at the Headquarters of the Organization at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

\* \* \*

It is estimated that in Europe and North America between 40 and 50 per cent. of all hospital beds are occupied by mental patients. The care of the mentally ill therefore presents a problem which concerns society in general and one crucial aspect of this vast problem is the nursing care of these patients. The lot of the mentally sick, not so long ago believed to be possessed of the devil, banned from society and often chained in the dungeons of prisons, is today greatly improving, and their treatment is much humanized due largely to progress in psychiatry. In most countries they are now recognized as invalids like any other.

The experts of the World Health Organization were of the opinion that it is time that the role of the psychiatric nurse is recognized in the same way as that of the psychiatrist.

That is why they recommend that the contribution of the psychiatric nurse to the therapy of the mentally ill should be acknowledged and that she should be recognized as the right-hand of the psychiatrist and not merely a custodian or domestic servant as is too often the case.

The psychiatric nurse should be called upon to play the same role *vis à vis* the mentally ill as her colleague, the public health nurse, plays towards the public as a whole. She should not only help to cure the sick in hospital, but also at home, watch over them through home visits, give counsel in problems bearing on the mental health of the community in much the same way as, for example, the public health nurse works to prevent tuberculosis.

### The Training of the Psychiatric Nurse.

In order that the psychiatric nurse should be prepared to fulfil the extremely important role which is entrusted to her, her theoretic training and practice should include such elements as: a comprehension of personality growth and development, of theories relating to human behaviour, of concepts of anxiety, some knowledge of the sociological aspects of psychiatric assistance, and of "group methods" applicable to situations within ordinary community life.

The WHO experts also recommend that the psychiatric nurse should be encouraged to participate more actively in research in prevention and treatment of mental illness. This would not only give her a better understanding of her own role but the results of her observations of patients would be a valuable tool for the psychiatrist, especially in his understanding of relations between the patients and nurses and of the effects of the nurse on her patient.\*

Among other subjects which interested the WHO experts and on which they formulated recommendations, were that psychiatric nursing care should be integrated into the overall planning for all types of nursing, that information should be exchanged between countries, that training for psychiatric nursing should be assisted with scholarships, and that regional and inter-regional meetings on psychiatric nursing should be encouraged.

Participating in the First Meeting of Experts on Psychiatric Nursing of WHO were:

#### Members.

Miss E. A. Garrison, Training Specialist, Psychiatric Nursing, National Institute of Mental Health.	Bethesda, U.S.A.
Miss Olive Griffith, Mental Nursing Officer, Ministry of Health.	London, U.K. (Chairman).
Professor G. Kraus, University of Groningen Psychiatric Clinic.	Netherlands (Vice-Chairman).
Dr. Tsung-yi Lin, Department of Psychiatry, National Taiwan University Hospital.	Taipeh, Taiwan.
Miss I. I. Marwick, Matron, Tara Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital.	Johannesburg, South Africa.
Miss Sylvia Rawlings, Matron, Broughton Hall Psychiatric Clinic.	Sydney, Australia.
Dr. T. P. Rees, Medical Superintendent, Warlingham Park Hospital.	Warlingham Park, U.K.
Dr. Ahmed Wagdi, Director, Mental Hospital, Abbassia.	Cairo, Egypt.
Miss O. Zetterström, Consultant in Psychiatric Nursing, School of Nursing.	Stockholm, Sweden.

#### Consultants.

Dr. Morven S. Brown, Director, Dept. of Social Work, Sydney University.	Australia.
Dr. A. H. Stanton.	Massachusetts, U.S.A.
Mrs. Gwen Tudor Will, Psychiatric Nursing Service, U.S.P.H.S.	Bethesda, U.S.A.

#### Secretariat.

Miss L. M. Creelman.	Chief, Nursing Section, WHO.
Dr. G. R. Hargreaves	Chief, Mental Health Section, WHO.
Miss E. Hill	Public Health Nursing Administrator, Nursing Section, WHO.

\* For instance, a study was made of one patient who was felt by the nurses to be a continually demanding patient. When the nurse noted that her staff, and she herself, were considerably put out by the patient, she turned her attention to the problem directly but in a new way, by starting to count what happened to the requests. She noted to her surprise that the patient was making about 30 requests per hour, three of which were met, four refused and 23 ignored! When the large number of ignored requests was responded to more directly, whether or not they were met or refused, the number of requests diminished to two per hour.

## Fifty Years Ago.

Words culled from this Journal, October, 1905

"IT IS POSSIBLE to stand aside in serene self-complacency offering only captious criticism to those who are doing the work for the public good, and to accept the fruits of that work when the victory has been won. . . .

"But those who are inspired by a strong sense of professional duty prefer to be found in the van, not the rear of the fighting force, it is their pride to be able to say when the victory is won, of the spot where the struggle was severest, 'I was there.'

"The reward of duty is the consciousness of its due performance so far as in us lies. On the other hand, if we remain silent when we should have spoken, inert when we should have striven, let us remember that there are sins of omission as well as sins of commission, and that the account which we must one day render will be no less strict in regard to the former than in regard to the latter."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)