

STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN SCHOOLS OF NURSING.*

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Student Government, or self-management by Student Nurses of their own affairs, has been in effect in a number of training schools—to a greater or lesser degree—during the past two decades. It was a natural development and not altogether new, as students in other types of schools and colleges were feeling the urge of self-expression, and were demonstrating ability to organise their social and recreational activities. Most hospital administrators and nurse educationists were in sympathy with the movement, realising that they were preparing groups of young women to accept responsibility and that, given an opportunity to develop their own affairs during the undergraduate course, they were more likely to be ready for responsibility at the completion of their training.

While the very nature of a nurse's duties, professional and social, demands ethical standards and a mental and moral discipline that bears no disputing, and one which definitely tends towards character building, those of us who can look back to the opening years of the century realise that there was much that was included in the disciplinary code at that time (and in some institutions still) that, in retrospect, seems unduly rigid and questionable as to real value or merit. The list of "don'ts" which faced the young student nurse when entering on her professional career left little room for originality of thought or action. One might ask "did the product of the schools of that period not justify the methods in force?" What suggested the change?

Several factors played a part in the introduction of student government. The two outstanding, and which appeared on the horizon simultaneously were: first, the increase in Schools of Nursing of students from universities and colleges where some form of council had been in effect, and who therefore felt the need or want in their new sphere, and secondly, the inclusion of students from Schools of Nursing in the various activities of the International Student Christian Movement. In fact, the invitations of the latter to join in their conferences were, in not a few cases, the *raison d'être* (on the American Continent at least) of the development of some form of student organisation. The student nurses wished to accept these invitations and qualify for membership so that they might send delegates to their conventions, but realised they were not organised to do so.

In most hospitals the movement began in a simple way, with the appointment of the usual officers and the organisation of groups for some particular function, such as:

Religious study groups.

Sunday evening vesper services.

Social activities—dances, tennis matches, etc.

Prior to this date practically all social functions were arranged and given by the hospital authorities and the students were essentially the "guests" for the event. Now the students make the plans, do the decorating, arrange any special feature, and the consensus of opinion is that they derive considerable benefit and pleasure in so doing.

The plans for inter-hospital tournaments—tennis, swimming, basketball, etc.—are made by the students as a rule, in those hospitals where student government is in force.

In most organisations, usually referred to as the "Student Council" or "Student Association," there is a definite constitution or book of rules. These may vary somewhat but are in the main fairly uniform and patterned after

similar organisations. There is an executive appointed by the students, and the Matron or Director of Nursing acts in an advisory capacity and is usually the Honorary President. The Home Supervisor or Home Sister may also be included, she being particularly interested in the "off duty" life and extra-curricular activities of the students.

The presiding officer is usually selected from the senior year and the other officers from each undergraduate year.

Having observed the development of student government for a number of years it is interesting to note how seldom an error in nominations or elections is made, showing that the student body as a whole has a real respect and appreciation of leadership and for those of their number who demonstrate strength of character and forcefulness.

If there are funds available it is helpful (especially in large hospitals) to have the assistance of a social director, either part or full time. She may be either a teacher of physical culture, Y.W.C.A. instructor, or someone who by training and natural gifts as a hostess lends leadership and guidance in the planning of their various programmes.

Students have comparatively little spare time and there are not many (and sometimes *not any*) members of the staff who have sufficient free time to discuss arrangements, speakers, artistes, etc., when preparing for any special function, and a paid official who can suggest how to go about the initial "approach" is of great value.

In some schools the registration fee (in part or whole) is used among other things as a Training School Fund for the specific purpose of defraying such social and recreational expenses as cannot legitimately be charged to the hospital and yet are essentially a responsibility of the Training School. For instance, the renting of tennis courts if the hospital does not possess such, the fees for a swimming pool, prizes for tournaments, incidental expenses for dances, etc., are all or any of the financial assistance that may be given to the student group to enhance their social life and lessen the expenses of their organisation.

Sub-committees are appointed, such as: (a) Social; (b) Religious; (c) Library; (d) Sick Visiting; (e) Glee Club; (f) Dramatic Club. The Social Convener should have a representative from each year on her Committee so that the interests of all are covered. This is probably the most active committee and one that needs to be carefully chosen.

It may plan for such activities as:—

(1) The appointment of Big Sisters prior to each probationary class entering—the Big Sister writing ahead to the prospective probationer giving her a few practical hints of what to do and what not to do—usually the result of her own recent experiences!

(2) A tea or simple "party of welcome" after the probationers arrive.

(3) A special entertainment of a more formal type when the class is "accepted"—on the American Continent known as "Capping" Day.

(4) Class dances.

(5) Tennis tournaments with neighbouring hospitals.

(6) Garden parties, bridge, etc., to raise funds for their social functions. (Quite a few student groups have raised money for the Florence Nightingale Memorial Fund through plays, concerts, garden parties, etc.) The value of this type of organisation is undoubtedly that it—

(a) Tends to develop a greater sense of responsibility.

(b) Prepares students in organisation work—*i.e.*, conduct of meetings, knowledge of parliamentary procedure, etc.

(c) Gives an opportunity of self-expression, as well as practice in public speaking, and in many cases brings out latent talent.

Any adverse criticisms or weaknesses could be confined to the individual member and not to the policy.

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