

Community and World Health, *Yvonne Hentsch, International Nursing Review, Geneva, N° 4, 1976.*

... Primary health care should be an integral part of the national health system. If an acceptable level of health is to be reached by all people in a given country it follows that local needs and individual participation in meeting them must have some central support and be included in a national and continuing health planning process. Basing their action on broad political decisions, the responsible health authorities need to identify problems, decide on priority programmes, define policy and evaluate periodically the health development programmes they have agreed upon.

All available resources need to be mobilized in this process and public and private institutions alike need to be included in the overall health care system.

So often private or other agencies launch health care programmes which, although useful, are not in accordance with the country's priority health needs. This is a waste of human energy and skills and of available financial resources. A recent Red Cross report points out that in spite of the immense potential of National Red Cross (Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies and the impressive sum total of voluntary effort put into their activities, these remain marginal and have only a limited impact on the populations they are out to serve. However, as early as 1974, the Nursing Advisory Committee of the League published a report outlining ways in which the League and its member national societies can cooperate with governments and other institutions in developing urgently needed health care systems. The report stresses the value of the Red Cross as a health agent and the unique contribution of the Red Cross primary health worker towards meeting health needs, as well as the extended role of the nurse in "health maintenance, promotion and protection of health, treatment of disease and rehabilitation". What is true of the Red Cross can also be said in varying degrees of other institutions, public and private. While local health needs and local participation in meeting those needs remain paramount in planning the delivery of health care it is equally essential that they be included in local and national health care systems; local action needs support from national health authorities, and the latter need to be geared constantly to the true needs of the country if their planning is to remain realistic.

To sum up, in spite of tremendous strides in medicine and technology, morbidity and mortality rates are still high in about 80 to 85% of the rural and peri-urban populations of the world. Malnutrition, communicable diseases and parasitic and other infestations still take an unnecessarily heavy toll of lives and diminish individual capacity to live a productive life.

Available health services are not improving health as one would hope, and are not available to all.

A new approach is being suggested: that of primary health care. It relies on active individual participation from within the community; the use of local resources to meet health and social development problems; and support from national health care systems. It also implies that health personnel must be

trained on new lines, whether they be primary health care workers recruited from the community, or doctors and nurses responsible for planning, supervising and evaluating the use of such workers and for training them in the light of recognized community needs.

Honest evaluation of health development in the past indicates that, taking the world population as a whole, results have been meagre. Greater knowledge of psychology and of the interdependence of economic, social and health development should lead us all to consider new approaches to health development. There is hope that we may be more successful in the next 25 years than we have been so far. As V. Lanara wrote: "Nurses believe that nursing has a unique contribution to make in cooperation with others to the betterment of society by helping people live healthier lives".

This is a challenge nurses must take up...and hand on.
