

TO IMPROVE NURSING

In September 1967, nurses from 19 countries met in Athens to study certain practical problems of their profession in a constantly and rapidly changing world. This Conference was organized by the International Association of Florence Nightingale Nurses. This was founded in 1925 and today has some five hundred members from 58 countries. Under its auspices are held study weeks organized alternatively by the League of Red Cross Societies (1928) and the International Florence Nightingale Foundation.¹

This Athens Conference, the fifth of its kind, met in the Hellenic Red Cross nursing school. Miss Yvonne Hentsch, Directress of the League Nursing Bureau, summarizes the proceedings below: ²

... The following extracts are taken from a summary submitted towards the end of the Conference by two participants, each of them a member of the rising generation of European nursing school instructors.

The general theme of the Conference was studied from four main aspects:

- a) Red Cross contribution to the improvement of nursing;
- b) improvement of public health nursing;
- c) improvement of nursing in hospitals;
- d) teaching as a factor in the improvement of nursing.

Each of these aspects was the subject of one or several papers followed by group discussion.

a) In connection with the Red Cross it was emphasized that its principles were identical to those which motivate nurses; that its

¹ In March 1965 the *International Review* published an article on the history and activity of the International Foundation.

² See *Revue Suisse des Infirmières*, Soleure, 1968, No. 1.

activities in the field of nursing are aimed at achieving the highest professional standards; that it is capable of encouraging constructive co-operation between nursing auxiliaries and nurses and that for these reasons it can contribute usefully to the improvement of nursing care.

b) With regard to the health visitor, it was recognized that her educative and advisory functions in a society where preventive and curative services were increasingly inter-dependent, demanded thorough preparation and a profound knowledge of human relations. As a member of a medical team she should know how to direct auxiliary personnel, obtain from the society she serves the necessary facilities for her work and she should be prepared to collaborate in research work.

c) The Conference studied what appeared to it to be the three essential aspects of the question of improving nursing standards in hospitals. These three aspects were: personnel, administration, evaluation.

The employment of married nurses, access to the profession for persons somewhat older than most present nursing school pupils, increased training for nurses, the judicious assignment of auxiliary personnel, rational use of present techniques; these were all considered valuable means of increasing the strength and efficiency of nursing personnel.

It was also emphasized that to a great extent nursing staff morale depended on good administration of the nursing services, and that morale, in turn, influenced the quality of the nursing.

In order to evaluate the quality of nursing various relevant factors must be studied and analysed and appropriate standards established.

d) Teaching was a subject which gave rise to prolonged debate in which various points of view joined issue. However, it was unanimously agreed that the traditional methods of teaching nurses were no longer applicable to preparation for the tasks entrusted to nurses today. Teaching should be on a broad basis and of a kind permitting students to exercise critical, analytical and reasoning faculties and intellectual curiosity so that their technical qualifications at all times can be backed up by sound knowledge of basics.

MISCELLANEOUS

Nursing students and, later on, nurses, must be prepared for advanced courses in order to cope with the ever-increasing spectrum of knowledge which she will require to carry out the new tasks entrusted to her.

It appeared in general necessary to admit to nursing schools only those candidates who were capable of following such basic instruction. Stress was also laid on the importance of well prepared teachers and a curriculum of various subjects forming a more readily assimilable programme than instruction in the separate subjects individually. Student participation in medical team work planning for the benefit of individuals or groups is one way of initiating students to a concept of nursing which takes into account moral, social, physical and psychological needs.

The Conference was closed with a reply to the question: What is the nurse's real function for which she alone is responsible? The reply is that one must seek close co-operation between persons responsible for drawing up teaching programmes and those who are responsible for directing the services where the nurse will be called upon to carry out her functions.
