

A NEW PROFESSIONAL IMAGE FOR NURSES

Under this title, the review "La Croix-Rouge Suisse" (Berne, 1973, No. 4) has published an article in which Mme Liliane Berger, President of the Swiss Association for Qualified Nurses, refers to the changes which have taken place during the last few years in the nursing profession, and whilst stressing the importance of nursing assistance, she discusses the importance, in this field, of professional training. An extract is given below :

The constant development of medicine and the evolution of society in the industrialized countries has led to a continual increase in the need for nursing assistance.

The profession will be able to meet this need in years to come only if it is dynamic, suited to present-day living conditions, and is able to interest and satisfy a substantial proportion of the younger generation, whether boys or girls.

A new image must be created for the profession of male or female nurse to replace the traditional image—or rather the superimposed and sometimes contradictory images—which the public, patients and health workers have formed in their mind; for example, that it is:

- a typically feminine profession, requiring gentleness, devotion and self-denial,
- an ideal preparation for marriage,
- an exacting and tiring profession, calling for a strong constitution,
- a profession in which one is called to serve, and in which obedience, respect for the regulations and traditions are of greater importance than intelligence and knowledge,
- technical work, contributing to medicine and hospital work,
- a profession which is becoming increasingly exacting and is seeking to gain closer affinity with medicine,

- an interesting career, but poorly paid,
- a profession where views are not expressed, and others decide your future for you.

It is true that the profession has in the past been marked with all of these characteristics. Whirled away in the rapid development of medicine and hospital facilities, in the thriving development of new techniques for nursing patients, and the creation of new categories of paramedical and auxiliary staff, even the nurses themselves—both male and female—no longer know exactly where they stand!

Numerous comments and studies made throughout the world by nurses and their professional associations have led to the publication by the International Council of Nurses of a definition of the main objectives of the profession: to assist the individual, whether he be in poor or good health, in activities which contribute to maintaining or restoring health (or to a peaceful end) and which he would himself perform, had he the strength or will-power, or the necessary knowledge, and to provide this assistance in such a way that whoever receives it may be able to regain his independence as soon as possible. In this aspect of her work, it is the nurse who has the initiative and control; it is the field in which she is especially competent. Furthermore, she helps the patient to follow the treatment ordered by the doctor. As a member of a team of health workers, she also helps the other members, just as she is helped by them, in working out and implementing the programme as a whole, whether it relates to improving health, to the recovery of a patient or tending a dying person.

This definition, which is marked by a change in concept tending towards preventive medicine, and not simply curative medicine, highlights the increasing importance given to the rehabilitation of patients into an active life, as well as the essential collaboration among teams of health workers. It demonstrates the active part that can be played by male and female nurses, not only in hospital services, of course, but also in the field of public health, by pro-

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viding home nursing, helping to educate the public in health matters, and preventing and tracking down disease.

In this connection, nursing assistance is not confined to carrying out orders given by the doctor, or to departmental routines. The male or female nurse is responsible for preparing, for each patient or individual placed in his or her care, an assessment of his resources and needs, bearing in mind his particular state of health, and for determining how, and by whom, this assistance may best be given. This aspect of nursing duties calls for sensitivity, a great capacity for comprehension, a thorough knowledge and good judgement. The assistance given is not only of a physical and technical nature, but must as far as possible also meet the needs which patients and those around them have for security, relationships and information. At a time when so many individuals in a society—and this is particularly true of hospital patients—feel lost in a technical and inhuman world, this assistance must be the concern of all those whose profession it is to tend others.

Another important aspect of “ present-day ” nursing assistance appears in this definition. This is the place devoted to active participation by the patient or individual. The nurse should not replace him in everything that he can do or knows how to do by himself. On the contrary, nurses must encourage him to keep his independence, or regain it as soon as possible. This has direct consequences on the hospital service equipment which is still all too frequently designed for bed-ridden and totally dependent patients; it also has repercussions on the development of home help services and policlinics.
