

CHRONICLE

Nursing Problems

The *International Review* has already spoken on numerous occasions of the important XIIth Quadrennial Congress of the International Council of Nurses, but it has had to confine itself to brief information pending the arrival of sufficient documentation. Today, it is in a position to give its readers, if not an exhaustive study, which, for lack of space, could not be printed in this Review, at least a glimpse of some of the work of this meeting.

As we have previously mentioned, this Congress took place in Melbourne from April 16 to 22, 1961, with the theme "Wisdom and guidance through professional Organization". It gathered together more than 1,300 nurses from 44 countries in five continents. The opening was marked by official ceremonies and the Congress then set to work in first class conditions, thanks to the perfect organization of the host institution, the Royal Australian Nursing Federation.

The ICRC was represented by the head of the Medical Personnel Section, Miss A. Pfirter, who was already in Asia and who went to Australia to take part in this Congress, which made a most favourable impression on her. Besides the International Committee, the League of Red Cross Societies was represented, as were other international organizations, notably the World Health Organization and the International Labour Office.

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Three basic elements formed the nucleus of the work : statutory deliberations of the Congress ; two papers dealing with : a) Nursing as a profession and b) The Professional nursing association and you,

and which constituted the two principal themes of the Congress ; finally group work comprising reports on the following subjects :

- Group I : Nursing Education
- Group II : Nursing Service
- Group III : Economic Welfare
- Group IV : Public Relations

The journal of the International Council of Nurses, entitled *International Nursing Review*, has devoted one of its numbers to this Congress and it is partly from the documents distributed at Melbourne that our information is drawn. It opens with the paper read by Mrs. M. Jahoda, of London, "Nursing as a Profession", which is of very real interest from the psychological point of view. Basing herself on a definition of social psychology, according to which it is "an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings", Mrs. Jahoda asks: "What is a profession?". She illumines the different aspects of a profession, a professional situation and its social mechanisms. She then asks whether the nursing profession allows its members, as well as the patients, to feel to the utmost the solidarity which binds them. She is convinced that it does, and she goes on to say that the nursing profession is unique in the sense that it is so organized as to ensure the protection of its members at the same time as being a service. These two aspects of the nursing profession can only be linked in harmony if they are approached in a rational manner, both on the thought level and on the action level. To do this, it is advisable not only to draw inspiration from the great ideal of service, but also to remember that every profession today requires one to take into account concrete realities and day to day worries.

Mrs. Jahoda concludes by saying :

"In conclusion, let me once more revert to my central theme : does the nursing profession adequately protect its members and the needs of patients and the community ? You can see from what I have said that I have no ready-made answer to that question. By virtue of claiming professional status you are committed both to

service and to self-protection. But as the profession is constituted today, you are facing grave problems in both respects which may yield only to radical thought and radical action. This challenge, I am sure, will not discourage you. For the search for the best balance between these twin tasks of professional organization and to adjust it to the ever changing needs of the community is in keeping not only with the great ideals of nursing, it is also the most human and most humane goal any profession can embrace."

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The subject dealt with by Miss Alice Girard, M.A., B.Sc., R.N., Director of Nursing, Hospital St. Luc, Montreal, was *The Professional Nursing Association-and You*. We shall deal more fully with this subject since it is of obvious interest to National Societies and we print hereunder a summary of Miss Girard's paper :

From time immemorial, human beings have felt a basic need to associate together. The professional associations were born of this need to strive together towards the same aim.

We represent professional nurses from all parts of the world. In spite of differences of race, language, governments and economic conditions, we have a common ideal which unites us. But this ideal would have very little significance or force if it were not constantly revised and our efforts to renew and adapt ourselves to the changing world were not maintained.

Let us consider some of the changing influences of this world :
— the need for instruction and better living conditions making itself felt everywhere ;
— the rapidity of means of communication ;
— the technical and scientific revolution which has had a considerable influence on medicine and nursing.

It is in this rapidly evolving world that the nurse has to work, and she can only do so with the support of her professional associations.

We know that physiological and psychological adaptation is constantly required of the human organism. It is the same with a professional association if it is to maintain the high quality of its aims. In return, the association needs a conscious and individual effort from each of its members.

The professional association has aims which far surpass private and pecuniary interests. It endeavours to raise the profession to its maximum level of usefulness to the community. In order to have the moral and social force to defend this ideal, the nursing association must be composed of numbers of members amongst whom there is complete unity. The association must be stimulated by the fact that our society has so great a need of nurses. But the nurses must maintain contact with other professional groups, exchange ideas and emerge from the silence which they have kept for far too long. By becoming conscious of her duties and her rights, the nurse can only be more effective in looking after her patients.

If the national nursing associations attached to the ICN differ in their organisation (committees, statutes, rules, etc.) they nevertheless have a common ideal and common aims: to create and maintain a high level of professional training, carry out research or systematic investigation into nursing, ensure economic security for their members and make each member aware of her mission.

The development of nursing means that the professional nurse is more and more called upon to leave her task to non-professional workers, whom she must instruct and direct when she is quite prepared to do the nursing herself. Dr. L. Simmons remarked that "one of the dilemmas of nursing is that the further one progresses in the profession, the further one moves from the patient." It is for the nursing association to see that this development is always adapted to the nurse's mission, which is to tend the sick, body and soul. It must also see that the nurse's attitude to the patient and the public is both an example and a lesson.

Nursing techniques, however developed they may be, should not blind one to the fact that the nurse is primarily there to serve. Observation, understanding and sympathy remain the distinctive elements of a good nurse. "The educated man must be master of his technology and not subservient to it."

Finally, it is for the professional association to see that material and social conditions make the nursing profession attractive and thus ensure satisfactory recruiting. It is for this reason that "research", the systematic study of the future of nursing, must be undertaken by the national nursing associations in all parts of the world.

In the sphere of "research" and "investigation", the International Council of Nurses is there to help them, to advise them and to guide them. The national associations will not be alone in their efforts to ensure the best possible standard of nursing in the world.

Miss Girard adds that whatever its structure or means of activity, a national nursing association must concern itself with maintaining a sufficiently high level of professional education, with seeking economic security for its members, with building for the future by discovering fresh tasks to be undertaken: in a word it must preserve the traditional values which have proved their worth and add to these values those which involve a modern and practical awareness of life. Because the nurse also has rights in the economic sphere: a reasonable standard of living, opportunities for promotion, sensible working conditions, security in work and retirement, and this must be watched over by the community itself.

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As can be seen, two principal themes emerge from the foregoing papers: *a*) the necessity for the nursing services to be constantly taking scientific progress into account and *b*) the protection of the nurse in the field of work and social security.

There were other speeches which, taken as a whole, reflect the same preoccupations, albeit from different aspects, and we shall therefore confine ourselves to quoting some of their titles: Administration for Nursing Service, the Responsibilities of a Professional Nurses' Association for the Improvement of Nursing Service, the Economic Aspect of Nursing, Means of Communication within the Nursing Profession and with other Professions and Occupational Groups, Organisation for Nursing Education related to Changing Trends in Medicine and Public Health.

We finish this article by pointing out that the watch-word decided on for the next four years is "inquiry", and we think it useful to recall some of the essential ideas put forward by Miss Ellen Broe, Director of the International Council of Nurses Education Division, in a speech entitled "Planning for the Future" in which she reminds heads of nursing of the benefits which accrue from broadening the mind and the need for research.

“ There is a great deal of discussion today on the question of research and whether nurses should carry out research.

Many inquiries into nursing and education for nursing have been undertaken either by nurses or with the participation of nurses. How far these inquiries have carried us it is hard to say. Some answers have certainly been found and some of the recommendations that have emerged may become of great help to international as well as national groups....

Against the background of such developments as have been sketched—with community health programmes and the preparation of nurses directed towards the work with families—it seems that we will need to study our situation very carefully, and not only study it, but also experiment with different types of educational programmes in different settings.

This will require a complete open-mindedness, a willingness to change, to accept failure and to persevere—perhaps over a very long time—in the search for the best possible education for nurses.

I believe there is a need not only for national groups to get together, but also for an international group to meet and discuss the type of inquiry into nursing education which we ought to have. Internationally, the important thing is to discover all the profound things people have in common rather than the superficial things in which they differ. The time seems to have come when we should consider examining : what do people entrusted to the care of nurses expect from them ? In what particular aspects, in their opinion, can nurses help them in a better way than other members of the health team ? On this basis we could in a realistic way study the functions of nurses and thus plan for the future of nursing education.

In examining our functions we must look at our traditions and see whether they keep us back or lead us on in our work for the future. The best inheritance we can carry over from the past is the unshaken faith in the course of nursing.

The spirit which continually drives nurses on to seek better ways, as Miss Nightingale spoke about it, will stimulate the nurses of the future not to leave any stone unturned in their attempts to improve nursing care through the improvement of nursing education.”