

## THE CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSING SERVICE

*The World Health Organization has set up an Expert Committee on Nursing, whose fifth report<sup>1</sup> has now been published. The problems mentioned in that report being of particular importance to National Societies which operate nursing schools and hospital services, we believe the following summary will interest them.*

Every country should "develop at least a small nucleus of nurses capable of advancing to positions of responsibility and leadership". This recommendation is made by the WHO Expert Committee on Nursing in its fifth report—the first of its reports for twelve years to deal with general aspects of nursing. During that time many changes have occurred that have influenced the development of nursing services within health and medical care programmes; the Committee therefore met to consider the provision of such services, the education of nursing personnel, and the encouragement of research aimed at improving patient care.

Within the next decade, the Committee observes, nursing will encounter some of its greatest and most exciting challenges, and the nurse of tomorrow will have to accept unprecedented responsibilities. Because of the increasing complexity of nursing tasks, the Committee considers that each country should devise a rational system of nursing personnel, based on the level of decision needed in each aspect of nursing work.

An effective system might be obtained with three categories of personnel: nurses with the ability and judgement to provide a service at a professional level, nurses providing generalized patient care of a simpler nature, and nursing personnel performing specified tasks requiring considerably less use of judgement. Clearly, the relative numbers in each category would vary according to the

---

<sup>1</sup> W.H.O. techn. Rep. Ser., No. 347, Geneva, 1966. See *WHO Chronicle*, 1967, No. 4.

demand for nursing services and the economic and human resources available in a given country at a given time. The quality of patient care is likely to be improved by the use of "nursing teams" consisting of personnel in the different categories, with the best prepared nurse having the major responsibility for planning.

Quality in nursing care, the Committee emphasizes, can be assessed only in terms of the benefit received by the patient. Thus it is essential that nurses be given, from the start of their nursing education, a broad preparation in preventive, curative, and rehabilitative services. Moreover, a high standard of general education, comparable with that of other professional groups, is essential. Basic nursing education should, wherever possible, be incorporated into the system of higher education in each country; from the start interest in research should be encouraged, since research is required if nursing practice is to keep pace with community needs.

The Committee stresses that postbasic education is essential for the development of nursing leaders; guidelines are provided in the report. Some form of in-service training is suggested as an alternative in countries where facilities for postbasic education are not yet fully established.

---