

# EXPANDING THE ROLE OF THE NURSE

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It is now widely accepted that improvement of efficacy and efficiency of our health services necessitates, among other things, a realignment of functions or roles of health workers. Considerable time has been devoted to thought and discussion of the roles of various members of the health team, and physician and nurse are often at the centre of controversy. There seems to be little doubt that these two members can in cooperation arrive at a more effective use of their respective skills and time in working to meet the health care needs of people. Many factors point to the necessity for nursing to take broader responsibility in the health field.

The School of Nursing at McGill University responded to this imperative by establishing a nurse internship of two months following upon the baccalaureate degree program. Experience for the plan is found in four ambulatory care centres and places are provided for sixteen interns. At the present time there is a nurse coordinator from the School in each area who is responsible for the planning and for a considerable amount of teaching.

Pre-eminent among the reasons for adopting the idea of the internship was the advantage of utilizing the nursing skills and abilities developed within the baccalaureate program as a most suitable base from which to expand the scope of nursing. It was also hoped that in clearly identifying and putting to use the skills acquired in the degree program, doubts regarding their usefulness could be allayed.

The nursing student in the university program with a base of physical and behavioral sciences learns to assess the state of health of individuals, taking into account the influences of family and community. This kind of health assessment requires a high degree of interviewing skill so that the nurse can elicit from the patient information which will lead to an effective plan of nursing. This intercommunication has a therapeutic aspect through which a patient or client can find tension relief or support. Although good interpersonal relationships rely somewhat on seemingly innate personality traits there is much to be learned about human behavior and the art of helping. How this base of knowledge and skills acquired by the student in the university is applied to the study of health and illness is of the utmost importance in preparing the nurse for a unique role in the health team. In the degree program various courses and nursing experiences are provided which will help the student appreciate the

human being as a dynamic integrated organism subject to internal and external influences on health and illness. This student learns to concentrate on individual abnormalities of function rather than details of pathology, although pathology plays a part in this understanding. This notion of "wholeness" is not necessarily acquired easily and is somewhat hard to test.

The ultimate goal of the degree program in nursing is that the nurse through an understanding of health and illness and the ability to assess health status will be able to provide appropriate nursing measures. Some of the information required by the nurse for this purpose must be gathered from other sources, especially the physician. The ability of the nurse to glean more of the information needed through the ability to carry out more specific physical examination would enhance the nurse's understanding of the patient's problem and could in fact provide direct assistance to the physician. With this in mind medical history taking and physical examination are being introduced into the basic nursing curriculum. These skills are not added onto the program but rather incorporated as the means of gaining as much information as possible in the investigation of health problems as a preliminary to planning nursing care. Thus the expansion of the scope of nursing is not seen in terms of an added technical skill or two, but rather in relation to the capability that the information acquired allows; capability to extend health care.

Briefly then the successful student arrives at the conclusion of the degree program with a comprehensive understanding of the significance of health and illness to the human organism which can lead to effective nursing intervention. It is upon these understandings and skills that the internship is built.

An internship by its nature is a reality situation in which a newly graduated student becomes thoroughly involved. This is the pattern of the nurse internship at McGill. Because the nurses' physical assessment and history-taking skills have not yet become incorporated thoroughly into the scheme and therefore into the student's approach, considerable time, at least sixteen hours each week, is spent with the physician in developing these skills. In addition the nurse intern spends time in working with new patients and in carrying out plans for health supervision and counseling. These interns are members of the health team — even though it sometimes has only two members — and carry responsibility for the provision of health care in the unit. They are expected to take a family-centred approach, backed by their previous study of human growth and development and sociology of the family in conjunction with repeated family contacts and continuous accumulation of family data.

The nurse-interns come together weekly with their nurse teachers and a physician consultant where indicated, for the study of specific health problems and nursing care situations. Videotapes, films, and other audio-visual aids are used. The interns are expected to spend time in the library following up on the day's experiences. For some students this is already a habit of learning. For the most part each nurse-intern has an individual learning program to the degree that the intern is able to identify learning needs. This is probably the essence of any learning experience, but is particularly important in the internship if the nurse is to arrive at a useful integrated base of knowledge. The nurse-coordinator plays an important part in the interns' learning and as nurse-teachers themselves become more experienced in doing physical examination they can carry the bulk of teaching. In the meantime the age-old process of passing on skills is proceeding and must be done to the satisfaction of the "passer".

Assessing the progress of the nurse-intern focuses on two interrelated aspects. Firstly, skills in sensitive and accurate history taking (developed in the nursing course) and in physical examination must reach the point where the nurse can recognize significant abnormality and conditions of instability. Secondly, the use made of the information gathered will in the long run depend upon the situation in which the nurse functions. Within the internship the nurse is expected to use this information to identify health problems and to decide upon an appropriate course of action. Progress in this area is monitored within the health team by the nurse-coordinator and physician, and a final examination is given.

For the most part the interns make use of the experience that is available to them. However, additional time is spent with a nurse interviewing anxious patients in an emergency setting, getting experience in pelvic examination and in the examination of children for those who were not finding this experience. No attempt is made to have interns acquire a mass of information about a variety of diseases, rather, the goal is a unified body of knowledge about the human organism and an understanding of manifestations of malfunction. This process begins with the nursing program, not the internship. With placements available for sixteen students, selection of those who are interested and ready is important. Lack of interest or lack of readiness means that the nurse will choose some other aspect of nursing, or some other method of preparation for expanding the scope of nursing.

In selecting candidates, emphasis is placed upon consistently good academic standing, level of achievement of skill in nursing, including interviewing, and the nurse's preparation in general. Nurses

from both the basic and post-basic programs are considered. These two groups have arrived at the degree level in markedly different ways and therefore have different qualities to assess and different needs to be met in the internship.

The intern program is not planned to prepare nurses to function in a particular role, but to provide a health service that is needed in many settings, a service which is not always available, that of health teaching, supervision and counseling; that of health maintenance. This nurse with an expanded role is found to be more valuable in association with the physician and other members of the health team. Where this nurse can most effectively function must be investigated through demonstration, experimentation and evaluation. Research is also a responsibility of the university and such investigation is under way.