

*THE TASK FORCE REPORTS OF THE COST OF HEALTH
SERVICES IN CANADA . . . A RESPONSE
From the Canadian Conference of University Schools of Nursing*

THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE of University Schools of Nursing, an association of 22 university schools from nine Canadian provinces and a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, is concerned with the nation's health and with the university preparation of nurses well qualified to contribute with other health workers to the development of health services.

We in this organization endorse the aims of the Committee to Study the Cost of Health Services in Canada and find in the Report of the Task Forces recommendations which point to better delivery of health care and more effective use of the health dollar.

Focusing as the Report does on the costliest areas of health care, hospital facilities and medical care, some of the recommendations tend to look inward and to be remedial. The broad picture, however, is one of regional planning, with the assessment of health needs, the establishment of priorities, the development of health services in relation to population, and the utilization of health workers as a team. We believe that only in this context can the functions of personnel be assessed and appropriate educational programs developed.

Health centres with a balance of ambulatory and hospital facilities can provide a flexibility of care located in the community where it is needed. The health centre along with the specialized hospital, which can no longer remain isolated, and other health facilities can provide a chain of services geared to the patient and not to any professional group. In the health care system of the future, workers must find new ways to function and to work together.

The Reports recommend that internal management of health facilities be studied and proven management principles be applied. This applies especially to the hospital which is aptly described as "a series of related systems with multiple goals in which a delicate balance must be maintained." The essential purpose of the hospital is the provision of medical care for the sick and a considerable portion of expenditure is originated by physicians with little accountability.

Nursing service closely associated with medical care accounts for approximately 50% of the hospital personnel budget and suggests a fruitful area for cost reduction through better utilization of the nurse.

Health services outside of the hospital are directed towards the prevention or early detection of illness, an objective which, if achieved, would reduce hospital usage and therefore costs, and would in the long run result in a higher level of health. In this area the number and kind of health personnel appear to be the key to effectiveness. The development of interdisciplinary experimental projects providing health care and the examination of professional functions is of prime importance.

NURSING

The Reports make recommendations with respect to nursing: (1) measurement, assessment and improved management of nursing services in hospital and (2) extension of the role of the nurse, particularly in relation to that of the physician.

Some 70% of nurses are employed in hospitals and similar institutions across the country. Nearly all of them have been prepared in hospital schools of nursing; i.e., in situations similar to the one in which they work and less than 5% have had any additional preparation. It seems unlikely that without considerable help, this large group will markedly change a system, through which they themselves have been conditioned. Nurses with a high degree of skill in nursing and an understanding of human behaviour are needed to alter a rigid outmoded system. Nursing alone cannot effect this change.

Most of the suggestions for the improvement of nursing service require systematic investigation. The relationship between turnover rates of general duty nurses and their opportunity to use knowledge and judgment can only be assumed. Studies of timing and staffing patterns have had little overall effect. Research of nursing and quality criteria has scarcely begun. Lack of funds and of nurses adequately qualified has retarded research in nursing.

The extension of the role of the nurse is a part of progress and professional development. There is question as to the direction this development should take. Some physicians, committed to a particular pattern of medical care and overworked, are seeking an assistant and they see the nurse with a basic preparation in health science a suitable person to take on "trivial fatiguing activities" or locating in remote areas "trained to diagnose and offer some therapy." A physician's assistant suggests a new cadre of health worker for an already complex system of health care delivery. On the other hand

it is apparent that nurses at the baccalaureate level now have many skills which they do not have an opportunity to use and these include health assessment, health counselling, and technical skills. We believe that this question regarding the extended role of the nurse must be answered in terms of total health services, not just medical care. Study of the utilization of health professionals should include a well designed project to demonstrate the most effective role for the graduate of the university nursing program.

The Responsibility of the University School of Nursing

Far reaching changes are taking place in nursing education across this country and a pattern is emerging which is more nearly related to present demands in the health field.

Basic schools of nursing are moving from service oriented hospitals into educational institutions and nurses in a setting geared to learning are being prepared to give a high quality of intensive nursing care to the acutely ill in home or institution. Career development is along the line of patient care, through special clinical courses, and not by way of administration. This graduate with attention focused on patient care should be able to relinquish non-nursing activities.

The university, at the baccalaureate and graduate level, prepares nursing experts in various fields, teachers for all types of nursing programmes and, increasingly, nurses able to carry out research. These graduates function in a variety of settings in association with the physician and others in the health team.

The baccalaureate programme in nursing consisting of courses in nursing with a foundation in the biological and social sciences, prepares a nurse able to assess the health status of individuals, to supervise a treatment plan, to do health counselling. This nurse is able in hospital to plan nursing care on an "individual rather than routine" basis; carry a large portion of patients who come to the clinic and to increased ambulatory facilities; care for patients in the home; see patients in the doctor's office. This nurse is the physician's associate.

Time is a vital factor in this nurse's function. The nature of nursing requires that a nurse spend time, over a period, with a patient which provides an opportunity to assess the patient's health needs and to influence health plans.

The number of these graduates from the university is still small, but all Schools of Nursing are prepared to increase enrolments. Programmes for the post-basic preparation of graduate nurses are proving less effectual and are being phased out. Even the small number of graduates from basic nursing programmes in University,

give ample evidence of their ability to extend the role of nursing within the health care system.

Graduate programmes in the University prepare the Nurse Specialist for consultation, research, teaching in the University and directing nursing services.

It has been estimated that one quarter of the nurse population should be graduates of university programmes. To meet this requirement, university schools must increase student enrolment. This is difficult until more well qualified nurses can be added to faculty. The situation can only be improved when more money than is now available for bursaries, is forthcoming.

Improvement in the quality of nursing care and utilization of nurse practitioners depends upon soundly developed research projects. Research grants must be made available to university schools for the development of such projects.