



LEADER

Service planning — an essential role of the nurse

At the end of October a one-day workshop was held at the King's Fund Centre in London. It was organised jointly by Joy Reynolds of the King's Fund and Marion Prince of the Polytechnic of North London. A paper, prepared and circulated to participants previous to the day by the two organisers, expressed concern about the confused role of the nurse in service planning. Under the able chairmanship of Audrey Emerton, RNO, the paper was first commented on by four nurses representing a whole range of interest.

The first comments were made by Miss D. Blenkinsop, RNO, then Mr. H. Teaney, Area Nurse, Miss M. Coffell, Nursing Officer, and finally Miss M. Lyne, DNO. General and group discussion then took place over the rest of the day between an audience of about 35 senior nurses.

The debate reminded me that the role of nurses in service planning is considerably underestimated, not only by other professions and colleagues, but by nurses themselves. Nurses, we found, are in a unique position. They are alone of all the officers involved at district level to have a direct link to colleagues that care for patients over a 24-hour period; the very reason of our existence. It was established that too much nursing advice had been channelled through one person at area level, that is the Area Nurse (Service Planning), and that that advice had generally been all nursing in content. The reorganisation of the NHS in about 18 months time allows senior nurses to rethink their strategy on service planning advice they offer to both the new district management teams and to the district health authorities themselves.

Senior nurses will have to treat the simplified planning system with much greater enthusiasm than they have done in the past. Perhaps some are disillusioned because the planning system did not achieve its objectives in the first three to four years because of lack of funds. But it is even more important to plan the services effectively when there is even less money available. Because 99 per cent of revenue is already used is not to say that the present way is the best way to use it. Someone said at the workshop that many nurses at the patient level could say what should be done — how change could be made — but nobody asked them!

It was also suggested that some senior nurses were content to have delegated to them the nursing function and for a say in matters relating purely to nursing. Yet it is possible that only nursing has the full answer to many of the planning problems facing health authorities today. Where nurses have made progress in the planning of services it is in the fields of mental handicap, mental illness and community care. It may be significant that it is in those areas where medical input is normally less assertive. The major resources, however, are to be found in the acute specialties where medical opinion is strong, particularly if backed by a university.

One way for the nurse to make her contribution is for her to be aware from the time of entering training that service planning is as much her responsibility as anyone else's. The senior manager's task is to develop sensitive, economic systems to tap the knowledge at the appropriate levels, but not, I suggest, only through committees. The reorganisation of the NHS allows for a complete review of role and function of posts and the use of people. The questions were raised: Would the core of the client planning groups of the future consist of the Director of Nursing, Unit Administrator, and the appropriate medical member? What support from the district or within the unit would be necessary? Was it important to develop posts in middle management that have a planning role as well as a clinical function?

I consider that it is not too soon to consider these questions and decide what is necessary to equip senior nurses with the know-how to become the major influence in service planning.

The workshop generated enthusiasm and interest and I do trust that its effects and influence will be felt long after the 1982 changes are completed.

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In this issue, the last of the year, we should like to take the opportunity of wishing all our readers, a very happy Christmas.

Anthony Carr