Psychiatric Nursing

Psychiatric Nursing

A Therapeutic Approach

Edited by
Peggy Martin

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For Graham with Love

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Foreword

The mentally ill in hospitals, in community facilities and in home services count on nurses to help them to solve their interpersonal and psychosocial problems. Meeting this expectation of patients is the purpose of psychiatric nursing practice. In order to provide useful nursing services, nurses require theoretical understanding of the common presenting problems of patients, as presented in this textbook.

The problems of mentally ill patients do not arise overnight. They consist in patterns of behaviour, evolved as adaptive response to experiences earlier in life. Individuals acquire behaviour patterns in interactions with persons who are significant to them in some way. Such interactions occur during child-rearing encounters in the home, during contacts with peers and teachers in school, in work situations and in other social institutions such as churches. Some of these patterns and behavioural acts, which are variants of a pattern, endure throughout life and serve to assure continuing growth and constructive living in the community. For the mentally ill, however, the situation is otherwise.

Persons who become mentally ill generally acquire behaviours important to them in terms of relief from anxiety and their psychosocial survival as they perceive it at a given time. These patterns of behaviour, which in earlier situations had great utility, persist and tend to become automatic, to be used without thought. This occurs, in part, because the behaviours are known, familiar and provided relief from anxiety. Such behaviours continue to be used, even though they are maladaptive in terms of continuing personal development and living in the community, for the patients are unaware that such behaviours are dysfunctional. One patient, after sustaining marked improvement in her condition, referred to her previous behaviour as her 'trapadaptation', an apt characterisation.

Maladaptive behaviours reflect lacks and gaps in the development of intellectual, interpersonal and social skills in accord with age, in-born capacities and social expectations. They prevent or limit social living within the community. Such inept behavioural patterns are replayed, recurringly, within the in-patient milieu, by patients in their interactions with other patients, nurses and other staff members of the hospital. Helping patients to recognise and to resolve these difficulties is the main challenge of nurses employed in psychiatric services.

Nurses do not change the behaviour of patients. What nurses do is to initiate, assist and support patients in their efforts to change their own behaviour. Nurses do this first by defining the nature of the problems of each patient. This requires application of the nursing process and of theory,

as described in this textbook. Armed with theoretical understanding of presenting difficulties of patients, nurses then use nurse–patient interactions as opportunities to generate self-awareness in patients as a basis for patients gradually to reshape their own behaviour. Nurses also assist patients to know, to test and therefore to acquire new health-seeking behaviours as maladaptive patterns are gradually and slowly given up.

The work of nurses in psychiatric services is indeed disciplined, purposeful and difficult. It requires continuing self-study by the nurse so that patients are not used to meet the needs of the nurse. It requires theory so that the nurse's understanding of problems is guided by the best available scientific knowledge. It requires that the nurse's attention is focused on getting to know the patient as a person, so that the patient's dilemmas are appreciated while latent capacities for growth are tapped as new skills are developed. It requires that the nurse supports separateness of identity of both nurse and patient and yet uses the connectedness of the nurse–patient relationship for purposes beneficial for the patient.

Promoting changes in behaviour, in oneself and in others, is an elusive goal, limited by the available knowledge, and therefore a stimulating challenging field of work for intelligent enterprising nurses. This textbook will assist student nurses to acquire some of the basic intellectual tools with which to begin a career in this important, socially relevant and interesting component of nursing.

1986

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Preface

Psychiatric Nursing: A Therapeutic Approach centres on the skills used by psychiatric nurses in caring for patients with psychological problems in both hospital and community settings.

The book is primarily designed to help nurses to think about what they do and to clarify their roles and functions within the multi-disciplinary setting. The focus on nursing as an activity in its own right is intentional and deliberate, while recognising the importance of a wide knowledge gained from a number of different disciplines.

The book emphasises the significance of the therapeutic use of self in communicating with patients productively and in carrying out the process of nursing effectively. The first part of the book is concerned with the nurse's therapeutic approach to care as a member of a multi-disciplinary team and as an individual. The second part of the book explores the application of patient care through the use of patient profiles and the application of different nursing models and approaches to care.

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P.M.

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