

Nursing Care Delivery in the US : Challenges for the Decade.

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Summary of Presentation

The larger health care system in which nursing care takes place in the United States is undergoing radical change. During the 1960's, a period of rapid growth in the health care system, "care for all" became our mandate.

Availability, accessibility, acceptability, affordability and appropriateness were words associated with the health care delivery system. Presently, the health care system is responding to diminishing health care dollars and a new mechanism for payment to hospitals for many of the health care bills of patients. This new scheme, initiated by the federal government as a principal payer of the nation's health care bills and joined by other payors, has created tensions, as well as a reordering of the health care agenda. Affordability and appropriateness become the guiding principles.

Many factors conjoin to present challenges and opportunities in health and nursing care delivery. Some of them are :

- Competition among health care providers for payment of their services
- the pursuit of clinical privileges by non-physical providers
- the high cost of health care
- the involvement of consumers in health care choices
- the increase in numbers and competence of health care providers primarily engaged in high technology, specialty care in hospitals
- the self determination of professional nurses.

This paper will address the environment in which health care takes place, some health care statistics and facts about nursing. Challenges for the decade will be presented as nursing, the largest health care profession, which continues to enhance the academic preparation of its members, is described and projections made.

One major challenge for the decade ahead is the growth in numbers and the advancing age of older Americans. For the first time in our history there are more older Americans

than younger ones. As a young nation, we have much to learn from the world's older cultures in the care and caring for, with and about older people. This care and caring for the whole person, so much a part of nursing's work, must be proclaimed as important work for nurses. Helping people live with chronic disabilities is also nursing's work. This is in part a significant outcome of our high technology, high specialty health care system in which more people are surviving today who must learn to accommodate their disabilities. Nurses are able assist them to maximum independence.

Quality of life and the ethical issues surrounding health care to people become nursing's work as well. Assuring care in ambulatory care settings, at school, at the work site, in the home and in the hospice require concerted attention. Challenges abound. Nurses are most often identified with providing care but not often enough in policy decisions for effecting that care. That nursing is primarily a female profession must be acknowledged.

Despite the newness which surrounds us as new technologies emerge and better prepared and larger numbers of health care professionals appear, certain realities remain. The challenge was expressed so well by Bertha Harmer and Virginia Henderson in, *The Principles and Practice of Nursing*, 5th edition, in 1966. "The unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will or knowledge. And to do this in such a way as to help him gain independence as rapidly as possible. This aspect of her work, this part of her function, she initiates and controls, of this she is master. In addition she helps the patient to carry out the therapeutic plan as initiated by the physician. She also, as a member of a medical team helps other members, as they in turn help her, to plan and carry out the total program whether it be for the improvement of health, or the recovery from illness or support in death. No one of the team should make such heavy demands on another member that any one of them is unable to perform his or her unique function. Nor should any member of the medical team be diverted by non-medical activities, such as cleaning, clerking, and filing, as long as his or her special task must be neglected. All members of the team should consider the person (patient) served as the central figure, and should realize that primarily they are all assisting him. If the patient does not understand, accept, and participate in the program planned, the effort of the medical team is largely wasted. The sooner the person can care for himself, find health information or even carry out prescribed treatments, the better off he is. In fact, with the rational adult he should always feel that the choice is his own... If is this necessity for estimating the individual's immediate and long-term need for physical care, emotional support and re-education that makes nursing a service of the highest order."

The challenge of the decade becomes the reshaping of health care. Nurses are essential to that care. Professional nurses as the largest health care collective can and must make a difference as health and nursing care are planned, delivered and evaluated. ❏