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Nursing in the War crisis: A narrative review

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Abstract

Nursing is an age old profession, considered to be noble and has roots in the great wars which occurs between countries at the turn of the century. These wars helped frame the job responsibilities and scope of the profession. The earliest changes that occurred in Nursing profession were due to Florence Nightingale who had many experiences in the Crimea war and was able to incorporate them into the principles that guide nursing progression even till today. In this paper, we will ponder over the role these wars played in shaping the profession of Nursing and how the profession needs to change in the scenario of the impending wars in future. Also the expanded role of nurse in war time has been emphasised on.

Keywords-War, nursing, role

Introduction

Nursing is an art and science grown out of learnings received from the War crisis. Professional Nursing grew and was popularized when the great Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp assisted the sick and injured soldiers in the Crimean war. She then observed, learnt and refined her learning to work on the promotion of health and prevention of debilitating conditions. Then she went full-scale to put these in practice and the Modern Nursing was born. Since then Nurses have varied roles to play in the War crisis. This seems all so important in the present scenario where there is Unrest since we stand at the cross roads of a brewing World War III amid conflicts that have arisen recently or may arise in the future and as a Nurse, we have important responsibility towards mankind during such a time of crisis.

War crisis as the beginning of professional nursing

Florence Nightingale and the team of nurses worked in the Crimea War and saved lives of many. The mortality of the soldiers that was as high as 42% was reduced to 2% due to the collective efforts by these nurses (1). They used scientific principles related to sanitation, nutrition, treatment to help save lives of numerous during the war (2). Thereafter, many principles were explored which gave strength to nursing to grow as a profession. Many large wars like First World war and Second world war also have seen Nurses working selflessly in the war front to help and heal the soldiers and forces working in the area. Based on ideas and principles as felt by Nightingale, the nurses working in many military hospitals, not only applied these principles but also went forward towards promoting the concept of holistic health and care (3). These wars influenced the curriculum, teaching and learning activities within nursing.

Nurses and the first World War

The first war occurred between 24 July 1914 to 11 November 1918. Nurses, mostly women, were openly recruited as volunteers in the war to help out the injured soldiers and worked tirelessly to help and care for them (4). Such practices were open in countries like France, UK, Canada, Australia and even USA where there was a reported shortage of nurses during the First world war (5-7). Many new faces grew in the profession which furthered the face of Nursing profession during and after the

First world war like (8-10). These nurses wrote diaries, corresponded their memories and through scenarios they discussed, the basis of skill and knowledge and scientific principles of the profession. There was an attempt to understand the physical, mental, spiritual and social built up that a human being has and how nurses can tend to all these aspects of a human being (11). They were able to understand the intricacies involved in caring for a person and how to be able to care even for the enemy keeping one's professional duty at the highest. All these have given rise to the various ethical and moral principles followed within the profession of Nursing. Moreover, there was a felt need for preparing nurses for the war zone (19).

Nurses and the second world war

As the nursing care in the second world war, lasting from 1939-1945 was provided, it was more focussed on the specialities of nursing where in medical surgical (critical care), psychiatric nursing grew (12-13). There was emphasis on use of experiential learning, development of the concept of supervision, mentorship to help student nurses develop skill and aptitude of the nursing profession. The nursing was looked as to have more social, political and economic effect. Many new scientific concepts influenced the development of the scientific therapies and evidence based care within the profession.

After the second world war, the debate on whether nursing is just a female profession was initiated. It began opening the doors for males into the profession. It was also, felt that nurses must be treated at par with the soldiers who work in the war zone tirelessly to treat and help the injured soldiers in the war crisis. It led to developing of army and military corps /naval and flight nurses well equipped within the military to perform duties at time of crisis (14-17). Many countries mobilized the nurses into public health, disaster management and crisis prevention – broader aspects of care paving a path for newer concepts within the profession (18-20). They worked closer to the soldier's taking more responsibility (21-22) in the battle fields.

Changes in Nursing due to impending fear of another world war

As the world is already witnessing one of the most devastating wars of 21st century, Russia-Ukraine war, no field in the world has remained unaffected and the same goes for nursing too. With the fear of powerful countries taking the sides and diving into the progression of the war, it becomes imperative that the Nursing community is clear what their role is. Not only volunteering, providing immediate emergency services is essential but also, one needs to see that the nursing care is devoted to physical, mental and psychosocial wellbeing of the individuals involved in the war as well as those affected by it.

Change in the Nursing practice

The war nurse or military nurse has a huge role to play and is perceived to be one of the most important and iconic roles of nurses during war time. Nurses are usually autonomous when working in teams or independently during the emergent conditions of the wars and trained enough to volunteer right away as and when need arises in such situations. (23). It is essential that the Nurses themselves are emotionally and mentally stable since they can fall prey to breakdown, emotional turmoil and post-traumatic stress disorder owing to the war (24). Hence, the training of nurses to be deployed into the war zone must be strict and a separate curriculum must be followed to enhance all their coping aptitudes before they are sent for sharing responsibilities in the hotspot (25).

As war may grow, the limited number of army nurses who are directly recruited into the military might not meet the manpower requirements. As a result, nurse volunteers may need to be by humanitarian agencies like Red cross, UNESCO and so on for working in the war zone (26). These are termed as the "humanitarian nurses". Such nurses could be working in any speciality but as and when need arises, they can be put into the war zone or conflicted areas for providing support and care services (26).

Change in the Nursing education and administration

The effect on nursing education and administration is also immense as the impending war would lead to many challenges and these have to be met by adequate training of the volunteer or new nurses. The curriculum should include the newer defence technology, nuclear war fare, specific injuries and how to tackle them with improvisation in the battle zone. The role of administrator in introducing new training and allowing the in-service nurses the opportunity to grow as a war nurse may be required. Such a person may later on train other nurses to work in the combat zone. Allowing for a dynamic policy of education and stationing would also be required. Nurses need have an active say in politics so that they have active participation in conflict dismissal and resolution at first hand (27).

Change in the Nursing research

Nursing in the war crisis and its impact on nurses and common man or soldiers is an active area for research due to many physical, mental and social issues connected to it (28-29). There is a need to research on these issues surrounding the nurses working in the war and how to support them before, in and after the war. Even though research is present but the scope is less and more work needs to be done (30). Furthermore issues to be considered are the standardized protocols to be followed globally in case of war crisis and how to involve nurses into these issues (31).

Conclusion

We have come a long way as far as technological advancements in military or defence research is concerned. This calls for more advanced training as well as character building of nurses working within or outside the military. This is due to the fact that war effects all, whether you are in the battle zone or away from it. As a result, nurses everywhere must be sensitive about these issues and must actively participate, prepare and propagate crisis resolution and if unable to do so, must be ready to maintain and promote life in whatever war crisis they witness especially the Nuclear War.

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