

PERIOPERATIVE NURSES WORKSHOP

21ST OCTOBER 1022

Distinguished Speaker: Daasebere Professor Oti Boateng

**Keynote Address: The New Horizon in Health Care in
sub-Saharan Africa**

Venue: Ghana Registered Nurses Hostel, Accra.Ghana

Nursing is a very noble profession and nurses are the frontline staff in health delivery. I have been married to a nurse for 51 years. As a professional statistician, one of the components of statistics, which is biostatistics deals with measurements in medical areas and there are instruments that can be used to measure the efficacy of drugs etc. which I have great interest in. In 1982 I was at a workshop in Kenya and learnt about six tropical diseases including malaria, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, filariasis and trypanosomiasis. As a result of the workshop I was able to present a methodology which delineated the real contribution of social intervention factors in medical control programs like health education. This was through the use of pre- and post-intervention surveys, and comparing the difference to see whether the changes wrought were statistically significant.

I have a natural interest in health and health related issues especially general wellness. Last I was the chairman of the Ghana Registered Nurses Association Golden Jubilee celebration in Koforidua, and realised the huge contribution nurses make to health care in following the pioneering work of Florence Nightingale to bring nursing to its epitome. She sacrificed so much under dreadful conditions to deliver service with excellence and perfection. She was a nurse as well as a statistician, so there is an affinity between me and Florence Nightingale!

Four years ago in the celebrations of the Akwantukese, I presented a lecture on 'Moving Ghana's health forward - the socio-economic dimension of medical intervention'.

Health has been defined as the physical, social and mental wellbeing of the individual, and not merely the absence of disease. The health of the nation encompassing the physical emotional and social wellbeing of the nation, serves as an important development indicator of the country. Health is

therefore intrinsically related to development and national welfare. Without health there will be no life and hence no development. Nathan Rothschild died in 1836 at age of 59 of a routine infection easily cured today in anyone who could find his way to a doctor, a hospital or even a pharmacy. This was before the germ theory existed, and therefore before the notion of the importance of cleanliness. Rothschild was then the world's richest man but he died of a common infection. Since then medical science has made long strides from antibiotics to the pacemaker and birth control pills, from kidney transplants to artificial hearts. Since the Koforidua celebrations last year, today it is obvious that the peri-operative nurses are one of the nine groups of nurses that have come together under the umbrella of the Registered Nurses Association of Ghana. Since the peri-operative nurses are affiliated and recognised internationally they are part of the international professional code of conduct, and that code for nurses is based on the belief that individuals, nursing, health and society work together.

Recipients and providers of nursing services are viewed as individuals and groups who possess basic rights and responsibilities, and whose circumstances command respect at all times. Nursing encompasses the promotion and restoration of health, the prevention of illness and the alleviation of suffering. The statement of the code and their interpretation provides a guide for conduct and consistence, and relationships in carrying out nursing responsibilities, consistent with the ethical obligations of the profession and the quality in nursing and midwifery care. The fundamental responsibility of the nurse is fourfold: aiming to promote health, prevent illness, to restore health and to alleviate suffering. The need for nursing is universal. Inherent in nursing is respect for life, dignity and rights of the human being. It is unrestricted by considerations of nationality, race, creed, colour, age, sex, politics or social status and that is why they can work anywhere. Nurses render health services to the individual, the family and the community and coordinate their services with those of related groups.

At the workshop today, the nurses have presented many things from improvement in theatre productivity to communication. But one thing to

emphasise, since health is to be viewed in its holistic form, is nurses should concern themselves with the totality of the individual, so that interaction with the patient becomes part of the therapy to reduce tension and to dignify that patient. The drama today showed that making the patient afraid can dampen the patient's spirit, and the stress which emanates from this shock alone, can push the patient quickly to the grave. We don't want this. There is a lot to learn from that. When we talk about the individual's wellbeing, it calls for good eating habits and an avoidance of obesity. There is need to avoid the exposure to toxins, mental stresses etc.; and to talk about education. It has been recognised through various Ghanaian demographics and health surveys, that the higher a mothers' education thereon or access to information, the greater the positive impact on her child's health. This is very potent. I did the first survey in 1988, the second in 1993 and the third in 1998 when I was then a government statistician and co-ordinator. We must all adopt this very nice way of treating patients, and through the nurses' positive interaction with the patients, a lot of health education can be transmitted through the length and breadth of the country. The way the information and education is packaged and passed on is very important, and needs sociological and psychological input. As the first point of contact with the patient, body language, speech and the way information is passed on has got important ramifications throughout the whole country.

To what has been said so far I would like to re-iterate and support the identification of the patient which has been delineated, because the collection of patients' baseline information is extremely important. This should be used to obtain the identification tag for the patient so that throughout the stay the patient is always identified. It also prevents what in statistics are called type one and type two errors. It also aids operating on the correct site of the patient and has an error preventative aspect.

Recovery wards should be compulsory and from now on patients should never ever be transferred straight from the theatre to the main wards. In between there must be a recovery ward and it must have the appropriate gadgetry. Henceforth we have all agreed there must be a recovery ward in

each hospital's theatre. The establishment of pre-operative services is extremely important, and the establishment of the public health units with the appropriate feedback from the public health nurse, helps make decisions precisely of what is going to be done for the patient before he or she reaches the hospital.

One thing that was not mentioned was the privacy of the patient in the open wards or the OPD. In the presentations it was limited to the theatre. Health is holistic so the workshop candidates must interest themselves in other aspects of nursing, and not confine themselves only to the peri-operative aspects of nursing, as this knowledge about wellbeing is all encompassing and should be disseminated and used all over the hospital. The privacy and comfort of home is taken away from the patient when they come to hospital and this can impose unnecessary stress. Screening should be used so the privacy and dignity of the patient is observed and maintained.

Another thing, in Ghana we suffer from a lot of infectious and preventable diseases because of lack of sanitation. In Accra, Kumasi and other places there is filth all over, and this becomes the breeding ground of mosquitoes and other parasites. In running water schistosomiasis breeds and children who go into it are infected by the vectors. With health education this rate of infection transmission can be cut so that chemotherapy then does not become necessary. Health education can do a lot. We are spending \$772 million dollars on the treatment of malaria alone.

Also trauma related deaths are very bad in Ghana and could be prevented, so we must develop a mechanism where trauma is treated with the facts and we can save an awful lot of lives in the country.

In Ghana there are children who are born with spinal disorders ie: spinal protrusion in babies which is preventable by the administration of 5mg of folic acid once a week to all women of child bearing age. There are 3000 deaths from spinal protrusion and this could be prevented. Alternatively folic acid

could be used to fortify staple foods such as such as kenkey, banku, porridge or maize derived foods. This is done in Egypt and other countries.

As said before at last year's RGN Association in Koforidua, the code for the nurses is a guide for action, based on the values and needs of society. They will have meaning only if it becomes a living document applied to the realities of human behaviour in a changing society. In order to achieve this purpose the code must be understood, internalised and utilised by nurses in all aspects of their work. It must be put before and be continuously available to students and practitioners in their mother tongue throughout their studies and working life. From today the code should be translated to the various local languages. For practical application in the local setting, the code should be studied in conjunction with information relevant to the specific situation, which will guide the nurse in selecting priorities and scope for action taking.

Nurses should continue to interact positively with the patients, for the patients and society in general to have more faith in nurses, as nursing is a very, very noble profession.

Thank you.