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CHRONIC ILLNESS IN THE ELDERLY

THE ROLE OF THE NURSE

A study of the effect of a trained nurse on the health, morbidity and life-style of elderly people with chronic illness.

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in the University of Adelaide, South Australia, by
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Contribution to knowledge	
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SUMMARY.

"Only a Domiciliary Health Team based in the community can provide adequate patient care, and reduce the unnecessary pressure now placed on hospitals and other institutions concerned with the aged, the disabled and the mentally sick." 45

This was the conclusion drawn from a personal study of the health team in general practice in a rural area in 1967-1968. From this study, I realised that the nurse filled a key position in the team, and her role was outlined. Further experience in the care of elderly people with chronic illness led me to the hypothesis, that "health, morbidity and life-style of elderly people with specified chronic illness would be significantly affected by a trained nurse attached to a general practice."

Reports of other studies of the use of the nurse in primary and maintenance care confirmed this opinion.

The aims of the present study were ...

To define the role and training requirements of a nurse in the domiciliary care of elderly people with chronic illness.

To measure the 'coping-responsiveness' of elderly people with chronic illness whilst living outside of institutions.

To determine the value of a domiciliary nurse in providing continuity of patient care.

To explore how a domiciliary nurse can make an effective contribution to health and welfare services for the prevention of avoidable disability and unnecessary invalidity.

This was a controlled study based on an initial and final assessment of one hundred and fifty people with cerebro-vascular accident within three years prior to the initial assessment.

A method which measured change in people over a wide range of variables was devised and tested. Analysis of data collected was presented in several sections, each important for improved living.

Six major sections were considered ...

Physiological variables. (A).

Communication. (B).

Mood. (C).

Mobility. (D).

Activities of daily living. (E).

Recreational interests. (F).

Facts were presented concerning medications, including the costs of drug groups.

Formal, informal and societal resources of social support were listed, to indicate the use of community services.

Reports were provided by the nurses, giving details about their relationship with doctors, other relevant professional groups and the co-operation received from patients and their families.

The impact of monthly visits by the nurse on the progress of patients was noted. In particular, it was found that most benefit was obtained by the more disabled individuals.

This thesis can serve as a guide to other workers as to the maximum improvement in life-style which can be achieved by people with chronic disability.

The following variables have been shown to be amenable to significant improvement ...

Mobility

Walking.

Communication.

Accuracy of articulation of words

Written description of a composite picture

Naming defined pictures following visual recognition

Listening comprehension.

Mood

Observed mood.

Activities of daily living

Toileting
Showering
Undressing
Cooking.

Recreational interests

Gardening interests and skills
Participation in indoor games.

In the assessment of any group of disabled elderly people the above functions need appraisal as improvement can be expected; especially when a nurse, as shown, plays a major role in the team.