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'Angels in White' feel there should be more to it than was shown in the RTHK documentary

PEOPLE ARE SAYING...

WE, a group of nurses, would like to thank the RTHK for their two-part production of "Angels in White", which was shown on TVB's Jade network on the April 24, and May 1, 1983 respectively.

Similar to all other productions of RTHK, the two series have revealed facts which concern the public and the society we live in. In particular, we appreciate the vivid presentation of some aspects of the inadequacy of the health care system in Hongkong.

A lot of research work must have been put into producing the above two series. We note with interest that most of the contents shown touched on the Lamb Report (1974) on the Training and Education of Nurses in Hongkong.

"Practical training occurs in grossly overcrowded wards and causes great conflicts of conscience among student nurses. The beds are too close together to give even minimal nursing care and when camp beds are brought into use the workload is exhausting and at times almost undurable.

"Equipment to deal with such large numbers is insufficient, ... the attempt to give nursing care in such circumstance become a battle with time and the lack of tools for the job.

"... They have to accept the fact that there is one standard for the school and another for the ward, thus, they become part of a system which leads to frustration

"Lack of clinical supervision and training are keenly felt needs but this lack cannot be blamed entirely on staff nurses or nursing officers who themselves carry a heavy load." (Lamb Report, pp. 6,7)

We have to admit that the Lamb findings held true in 1974 is still relevant in 1983. Among other things, the Report stresses that many student nurses survive such experience and maintain their integrity and feeling for patients in spite of the adverse working conditions.

Besides getting job satisfaction from helping patients and receiving appreciation from the public (which were only mentioned once or twice in the programme), the question we would like to pose is what are the supports which help carry the nurses through their profession despite their low salary, insufficient welfare and limited prospect? Perhaps the RTHK should attempt to explore this question in a follow-up programme.

The following is a summary of nurses' enrolment in the various courses organised by the two nursing organisations, the HK Nurses' Association and the Association of Government Nursing Staff:

| The HK Nurses' Association | | ENROLMENT |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| YEAR | COURSES | |
| 1977-78 | a) Management/Educational Courses | 121 |
| | b) General Courses | 283 |
| | c) Clinical Courses | 1644 |
| 1978-79 | a) Management/Educational Courses | 96 |
| | b) General Courses | 329 |
| | c) Clinical Courses | 1380 |
| 1979-80 | a) Management/Educational Courses | 118 |
| | b) General Courses | 461 |
| | c) Clinical Courses | 716 |
| 1980-81 | a) Management/Educational Courses | 83 |

| Association of Government Nursing Staff | | ENROLMENT |
|---|---------------------|-----------|
| YEAR | COURSES | |
| 1981 | Educational Courses | 337 |
| 1982 | Educational Courses | 561 |

Most of the nurses (especially government nurses) who attend the above courses have to do so in their own time. In addition, there are many others who have given up their jobs in order to receive specialised training which are only offered abroad.

Yet all nurses who have sacrificed their time to take up extra training felt it worthwhile to achieve their aim of improving the health care standard rendered to their patients.

This important motivating factor which should be made known to those who wish to enter nursing was not mentioned in the programme.

Furthermore, the inability of both nurses and doctors to make any changes in their adverse working condition as shown in the programme may further undermine the public's confidence in government hospitals.

The lack of autonomy of both medical and nursing personnel who are the chief care-givers in the health services may also aggravate the public's discontent over the existing inadequacy of the health care system.

Statistics from the Association of Government Nursing Staff reveal a recruitment crisis in the nursing profession in government hospitals in recent years as shown in the following table:

| Year | No of Applications of Student Nurses | No of Recruitment of Student Nurses | No of Wastage of Student Nurses |
|------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1978 | more than 2,000 each year before 1978 | 197 | 24 |
| 1979 | 400-500 each year | 269 | 36 |
| 1980 | | 234 | 46 |
| 1981 | | 348 | 50 |
| 1982 | 300-500 | 399 | 36 up to Sept |

Though the programme has succeeded in re-stating the well-known facts of insufficient tools and manpower which in turn pose hazards to patients' well-being in government hospitals, it would immediately affect adversely the recruitment of student nurses which is already dropping dramatically in recent years. Not only would the alarming shortage of nurses strain the nursing care to patients, it could further intensify the already existing conflict between the public and the health care system.

Thus, in drawing the public's attention to nurses' grievances, we feel the two series may unwittingly evoke the public's negative sentiment towards the health care system in general and the nursing profession in particular.

The "Angels in White" is indeed an admirable attempt by the RTHK. Unfortunately, it seemed that only the gloomy side of nursing and the health care system were revealed.

We would appreciate if a follow-up series in which a more complete picture of the nursing profession would be presented to the public in the near future.

A group of Registered Nurses