

THE HOSPITAL HORIZON

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS BY DR. LEWIS S. ROBERTSON AT ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN TRANSSVAAL BRANCH

The hospital has opened to it a great opportunity as a co-ordinator of activities—professional, economic and social—in their application to the problems of health. In its broader aspect it has three primary functions, viz. (1) The care of the sick, (2) medical instruction, and (3) The study of disease.



Dr. Lewis S. Robertson, President Southern Transvaal Branch 1955.

The hospital should be the health centre of the community it serves and therefore must furnish every known up-to-date means for scientific diagnosis and treatment of disease, compatible with its status in the community.

The control of public hospitals in South Africa is generally vested in Hospital Boards, the election and/or appointment of personnel to which is determined by Provincial Ordinances. Medical matters are usually referred to standing Advisory Medical Committees for consideration and report.

There is no debating the statement that an organization without centralized authority cannot function correctly and efficiently and it is equally undebatable that the logical pivot of this centralized authority is the Chief Administrative Officer of the institution. The office of Superintendent in a hospital is the keystone of the entire organization's activity. He must be in possession of all facts currently pertaining to the institution's activity. There must be machinery to bring such facts to his notice as routine measure and not as an incidental performance. Occurrences of an extraordinary nature must be reported to him and reported promptly. The Superintendent's contacts must be intimate and all-inclusive, so as to present to him at all times a composite picture of the entire activity of the hospital. The office of the Superintendent is the medium of expression of policy and the court of appeal for the vexing problems which occur from time to time in the institution's operation.

The administrative functions in the hospital are those activities which, while not being directly the care of the patient, teaching or research, are nevertheless essential to the effective performance of these primary functions. The need for trained executives in hospital administration has frequently been emphasised, for Hospital Administration must be regarded as a career.

Many successful hospital administrators have admitted:

(1) that they entered a hospital administrative career by a process of drift;

(2) that their backgrounds for hospital administrative work were deficient in ways that would have been capable of correction if suitable facilities and opportunities had been available; and

(3) that a previous more-or-less chance experience in administrative work played a significant part in giving them the feeling they might succeed as executives in hospital work.

They are unanimous that a period of actual hospital experience is essential to become a good executive officer.

The Hospital is a complex institution combining medical services, business responsibilities and community relationships and requires skilled administration in order to care adequately for the sick and to utilize funds with economy. The need for trained administrators is strongly emphasised by many leading hospital managers and other informed persons. Inefficiency and waste will result from unskilled management.

No systematic training for hospital administration is available in this country. Curricula in hospital administration are needed, especially for training Superintendents for the smaller hospitals.

Attendance at conferences and visits to other institutions

The attendance of senior officials at conferences relating to hospitalization, and visits to similar institutions in this and overseas countries, should be encouraged to enable them to exchange experiences and discuss problems with colleagues. Hospitals greatly benefit by such consultations because senior officials can always obtain valuable information from such contacts.

Medical Staff

No institution is any greater than the staff which mans it. It is for the advancement of communal health that a hospital primarily exists and it is to the medical staff of the institution that the hospital must look for the materialization of its ideals.

The time when each doctor was a self-sufficient unit in the diagnosis and treatment of his patient has gone. In order to obtain maximum medical efficiency it is necessary to think in terms of organized medical practice. Accepting this as a statement of fact, the necessity of coordinating medical practice is apparent. The medical man by reason of his training and his environment and work tends to become individualistic in his point of view, and the coordination of these individualists into a working whole is fraught with considerable difficulty. Any scheme of organization of a medical department must of necessity guarantee the retention of ultimate responsibility for the care of the patient by the medical officer in charge, but at the same time it must so coordinate the work of all and complement the work of each that the maximum good may be obtained from the composite.

For good and coordinated medical services it is essential for the medical staff to initiate and, with the approval of the governing board, adopt rules, regulations and policies governing the professional work of the hospital. Such rules should provide for medical staff meetings and the review and analysis at regular intervals of all rules and regulations.

The necessity of approved ward, theatre and departmental procedures available to all members of the staff who have to perform the medical duties is obvious. Standardization as far as is practicable will avoid confusion and ensure efficiency. No change or amendment of procedures should be made unless the consensus of opinion of the majority is that a change will be beneficial.

Orders and instructions regarding treatment must be given in writing, except in emergencies, when verbal orders are permissible, but even these should be confirmed subsequently in writing at an early date.

In filling vacancies on the staff merit should be the main consideration.

Special Diagnostic and Therapeutic Services

It is in the diagnostic and special therapeutic services that a hospital really indicates its fullest acceptance of its responsibilities. Clinical practice of medicine is not complete without having its services complemented by special departments. The diagnosis and treatment of disease have progressed to a point where the clinician alone cannot offer all the services needed. The various special diagnostic and therapeutic facilities are essential. The hospital must, if it accepts its true position in the community, furnish all these facilities.

Cooperation of the Hospital with the Family doctor

The hospital owes a debt to the family doctor that cannot be paid by merely admitting his patients. Cooperation and thoughtfulness on the part of the hospital authorities will earn the appreciation of the family doctor. Hospitals have learned by experience how valuable is his cooperation. A system must be devised to furnish the family doctor with essential medical information relating to the condition and continuity of treatment of patients he refers to the Hospital.

Outpatient Department

The medical profession has become more and more articulate in recent years against an alleged exploitation of their services by

institutions. The large output of medical graduates from our schools of medicine is creating an economic problem which prods many a doctor to attack a system which may seem without careful analysis to affect his private interest. The growth of out-patient departments or clinics in hospitals has been one of the important developments of hospital service. Abuses have been discovered in individual instances but, with the intelligent application of methods of financial investigation and social-service appraisal, such impositions should be reduced to a minimum.

Let us go into retrospect to bring out the real intent of the establishment of the out-patient department. The tradition upon which it was established was from the standpoint of the community to meet a need for the care of those unable to pay for medical treatment. When the first out-patient departments were initiated, they were established at the suggestion of doctors on the hospital staffs in order that they might give continuity of care to those who had been treated in the free wards and were not able to pay for aftercare. The hospital out-patient department grew and now fills a specific need in the community. It is not a side show in the hospital service and its value to the community is immense. It is essential, however, that the medical care given in the department shall be adequate. In order to avoid differences with the medical profession there are factors which must be observed:

1. There should as far as possible be no competition between the out-patient department and the practitioner in his private practice.

2. The interview of the prospective out-patient with the almoner should be thoroughly enough done, and by an experienced official who should be reasonably sure that the statements made by the patient or guardian are accurate.

In setting up a scheme of out-patient operation the motivation should be the rendering of the highest possible type of medical service to ambulant patients, and its operation should be dominated by this idea. The volume of patients is not nearly so important as the numbers of patients intensively cared for and returned to the community in the shortest possible time as productive, economic units. A properly functioning out-patient department is a definite factor in the education of that vast group of the community which is in need of the greatest guidance in the care of the body. The application of specific therapy is valuable, but it ceases to accomplish the desired result if with the administration of that treatment is not included, either by direct comment or instruction, an idea of prevention of the recurrence of the condition.

The development of special clinics may be motivated by the desire to render more efficient services in individual cases, but analysis of the performance of these clinics demonstrates clearly that their true value lies in the fact that they permit more intensive educational work with patients in the care of their present condition and in the elimination of recurrence. They all have a very definite medical reason for their existence but they have an equally important social and educational reason.

Nursing

No matter what the hospital's ideals of service are, it is to the department of nursing to a greater extent than any other that the hospital must look for an expression of its ideals to its patients. It is the attitude of the nurse, her method of approach and her thoughtfulness for the patient's comfort, that creates favourable or adverse comments on the hospital's service. A well-organized and well-functioning nursing service is of paramount importance to the best interest of the institution.

The nursing service has two fundamental phases—the actual nursing of the sick and the teaching of student nurses. The importance of the tremendous influence the medical staff involuntarily

brings to bear upon the training and attitude of the nurse to her vocation, cannot be over-emphasized.

Dietary

The need for a scientifically balanced meal, properly prepared and properly served, is acknowledged, but at the same time it is important that the food should be palatable. There is nothing inconsistent in serving a scientifically prepared meal palatably, provided effort is directed along these lines. Such people are difficult to please through the palate. Second only to the nursing service in directness of contact is the dietary department, and second only to the nursing activity is the measure of the institution's success gauged by the patient's reaction to the dietary performance. That a successful dietary performance is a decided asset to the institution is unquestionable.

Acquainting the Public with Hospital Policy

The public has too long remained in ignorance of one of its noblest servants. In many instances, through misinformation and ignorance of facts, people have assumed an erroneous conception of hospital service and in some cases have even grown antagonistic. In the present day, when education is becoming more generalized and widespread, it is logical and right that the work of an institution which comes into direct contact with about 1 out of every 10 persons each year, should be thoroughly understood and appreciated by the public whom it serves.

Basic for any programme of public education is the worthiness of the cause. To this end the hospital must measure up to all claims made. Good service can only be assured through a well-equipped and properly-organized institution in which the personnel is imbued with the spirit of wholesome, efficient and unselfish service characterized by kindness, sympathy and interest in the individual patient. The spirit of the hospital personnel is most vital to a successful institution.

The hospital must make an appraisal of its own resources in relation to the needs of the community it serves, and no campaign of public education can advance with success unless it is intelligently and carefully planned. A programme of education to acquaint the public with its hospitals cannot happen of its own accord. Its success will depend upon thorough cooperation, initiative and originality, and unqualified support and enthusiasm. Every phase of the programme must be in strict harmony with the principles of the code of medical ethics. Since it is generally conceded that individuals cannot live independently, we must assume the same to be true of institutions. The community should be informed of the needs, service and necessary improvements of its hospital services. The programme of public education is never-ending.

Politicians and office bearers are continually changing and it becomes necessary to educate these people so that they will see the hospital from a humanitarian standpoint. The daily media for propaganda are the press and radio, and their services will be of inestimable value.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The hospital plays an important role in the life of the community; hence a high standard is essential. It affords many opportunities for medical staff members to keep abreast of their profession. The hospital should be a centre of education of the medical profession through its diagnostic and other facilities. It should be the source of general health knowledge to the community. The hospital cannot be separated from the problems of health. In its truest sense the hospital is an ideal of service conceived and dedicated to combat disease, including within its operation all the facilities known to mankind for the alleviation of suffering.