

A Study on the Problems related to Care Attendants

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Aims and Methods

This study attempts to examine the actual conditions and problems of private care attendance in hospitals from the standpoint of hospital nursing profession and that of patients and families. The information gained will be used to solve the problems of private care attendance in particular and hospital nursing care in general. The study consists of three surveys. Their methods are described below:

1. Hospital survey

7,422 general hospitals across the country were surveyed in November 1980. Of the questionnaires sent through the mail, 2,464 were filled out and returned by the directors of nursing.

2. Patient survey

Between November and December of 1980, patients were surveyed at 19 hospitals scattered throughout the country. Head nurses cooperated to distribute questionnaires to the patients before their discharge and collected them at the time of their discharge. Of the 1,284 questionnaires collected, 511 were of patients who were being looked after by private care attendants.

3. Family survey

From November 1980 to January 1981, families of patients looked after by care attendants were surveyed at 76 hospitals scattered throughout the country. Head nurses cooperate to distributed questionnaires to the families of patients at the time of their discharge, of which 970 were filled out and returned through the mail.

Survey findings

1. Hospital survey

88.3% of the hospitals surveyed had at least one private attendant. 11.9% of the patients at standard hospitals (those which have at least a standard number of nurses, and which, in principle, prohibit the hiring of private care attendants) were being looked after by private care attendants. The figure for nonstandard hospitals was 22.8%. The rate of patients looked after by the private care attendants increased in direct proportion to the increase in the number of patients assigned to each nurse, indicating that the private care attendants are hired to make up for lack of nurses.

2. Patient survey

67.7% of the patients looked after by the private care attendants were confined to bed, indicating that patients unable to perform basic daily activities are the ones who tend to require the services of the private care attendants. 92.0% of the patients surveyed expressed satisfaction with those services.

As for the future of the private care attendance, 65% of the respondents expressed one of the following views: (1) "In principle, I'm against the private care attendance, but if people want the service, they should be allowed to have it"; and (2) "I'd like to see the hospital provide all the nursing needs." Thus, in principle, most patients desire hospital nursing care that does not require the services of the private care attendants.

3. Family survey

In standard hospitals, 90.4% of the patients who required the private care attendants were attended by their families for an average of 60 days. By contrast, 59.9% of the patients in non-standard hospitals hired the private care attendants for an average of 73 days.

Families that provided their own nursing care for their sick family members, as well as those that hired the private care attendants, were faced with many difficulties. In one-third of the former, members of the family became physically exhausted, or even fell ill, from the care for the sick; and in half, members of the family suffered unemployment and other job-related hardships, 24.7% of those who hired the private care attendants revealed that their family finances suffered as a result of paying approximately ¥8,000 per day for 73 days.

Note

Formerly in Japan, when a patient entered hospital, a member of his family usually stayed with him and provided the necessary nursing care. But after World War II, when the nursing system was established and the time became ripe to put into effect the idea that hospitals should provide all the necessary nursing care, the proportion of families providing their own nursing care began to decline. However, many families still feel that they should attend to their sick members if the illness is serious. For this reason, coupled with the lack of hospital nurses, 10% – 20% of the patients are still attended by their own family.