



Unit 13 — English for Nursing III

Reading: English for Nursing Part 3

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The role of nursing in healthcare has changed dramatically in the last 20 years as nurses have taken on a wider range of duties and responsibilities. Caring for the sick has become more complicated, hospitals are more understaffed and budgets are tighter which means that often nurses are taking on the duties of junior doctors as well as their own work.

These changes are particularly visible in public healthcare where increasing rates of diabetes, obesity and other conditions connected to the modern life has put a strain on healthcare workers dealing with the growing number of complex illnesses.

Partly because of the increased workload and partly because nurses still earn a relatively low salary when compared to other medical professionals, fewer people are entering the nursing profession which has led to shortages of well-trained staff and deficiencies in many hospitals. In recent years, this issue has been a major problem in the care of the sick. In an effort to combat this problem, local governments and large hospitals have started offering incentives for people studying nursing. These incentives range from payment of tuition fees to a down payment on a house and have proved very effective in reversing the tendency of fewer and fewer new nurses graduating each year.

This increase in the demands placed on healthcare workers and specifically nurses has led to the need for greater abilities and better training. Nowadays, many nurses are pursuing medical specializations such as pharmacology or preventative counseling, which enables them to provide a higher standard of care to their patients. Of course, this doesn't mean that nurses should be thought of as being fixed to one area of medicine as the majority of nurses working in the public sector are multi-skilled and are just as comfortable dispensing medication as they are assisting in the rehabilitation of patients or preparing them for surgical intervention.

In fact many of the traditional roles of nurses are still valid today, such as helping a bedridden patient go to the toilet or aiding in the sedation of a patient, but their workload has increased significantly. Patients now have a greater knowledge of basic medical issues thanks to online doctors and medical encyclopedias, so now when the average patient is admitted to hospital they already believe that they know what is wrong with them and more often than not the condition is acute. Or worse still patients self-prescribe and then complain that the illness is not responding to the treatment. On the face of it, this sounds like the medical staff would have less work as the diagnosis has already been made, but in reality this diagnosis is often incorrect and leads to nursing staff having to convince the patient that their symptoms don't fit to that condition, an often time-consuming

process.

And this is not the only case where technology has made nursing a harder profession. Nurses are now called upon to order and interpret blood work and other laboratory tests, a duty which traditionally fell on the doctor. Take the example of x-rays, modern machines are now capable of performing between 3 to 7 tests in the same time it took the previous generation of machine to do one, this means that the person interpreting the results has at least 3 times the amount of work to do.

New initiatives in some leading hospitals aim to tackle these situations by curbing high costs, and reducing demands on nursing staff connected to chronic disease care by home monitoring programs whereby patients are monitored via the internet in their own home, freeing up beds and reducing the cost and time invested in these patients. Although these programs are in the early stages, the signs are promising with both patients and medical staff seeing the benefits.

Another trend in preventative medicine is the increase in screening which is often done in the community rather than in the hospital and allows direct contact with patients who may not otherwise have gone to hospital. Screening is particularly effective in detecting early signs of tumors and other growths, of course at this stage they cannot show if they are malignant or benign but the tumor is discovered.

As we move forward through the 21st Century it is imperative that authorities continue to find ways to make nursing as attractive a profession as possible to ensure that hospitals are well-staffed by qualified and interested nurses.

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Discussion Questions

Do you agree that nursing is seen as a less attractive profession than being a doctor? Why?

What else could be done to encourage people into the nursing profession?

In your opinion, are monitoring programs where the patient is monitored via the internet and not kept in hospital a good idea?