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# A study of the attitudes of twenty-four senior students in nursing toward chronically ill aged patients

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A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES  
OF TWENTY-FOUR SENIOR STUDENTS IN NURSING  
TOWARD CHRONICALLY ILL AGED PATIENTS

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
<b>Chapter</b>	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Problem	
Justification of Problem	
Scope and Limitations	
Definition of Terms	
Preview of Methodology	
II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY .....	6
Review of Literature	
Statement of Hypothesis	
III. METHODOLOGY .....	12
Selection and Description of Sample	
Tools Used to Collect Data	
Procurement of Data	
IV. FINDINGS .....	16
Presentation and Discussion of Data	
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	31
Summary	
Conclusions	
Recommendations	
APPENDIX .....	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	41

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Preference for nursing care during clinical experience as expressed by twenty-four students .....	17
2. Rank distribution of the preference for care of patients with acute and chronic conditions as expressed by twenty-four students .....	19
3. Rank distribution of the preference for care of various age groups of patients with chronic conditions as expressed by twenty-four students .....	20
4. Patients with whom students had the most satisfying and the most depressing experiences .....	22
5. Opinions of the students concerning their communication with different age groups of patients .....	24
6. Students' opinions concerning the adequacy of their preparation for nursing patients with different age and illnesses .....	25
7. Distribution of students' statements concerning their choice for work after graduation according to age group of patients and type of disease	27
8. Distribution of students agreement and disagreement with fifteen statements	28-29

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the past, medical and nursing interest and attention have been focused on the acute forms of disease. Acute infections and surgical conditions are still of great importance today but they no longer make up the major portion of health problems. Chronic illness is now the greatest cause of disability in the United States, and it is most prevalent among the growing population of older citizens.

By reducing the infant and maternal mortality rates and by increasing the life expectancy at birth, medical progress has enabled a greater number of persons to live to a longer age.<sup>1</sup> "The lengthening life span increases the total of chronic and other illnesses incident to old age;"<sup>2</sup> hence, "whereas 70.8 per cent of all people under 15 years of age have no chronic illness, 95.4 per cent of people living beyond retirement are suffer from chronic conditions."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank G. Dickinson, "What Do We Get for What We Spend for Medical Care," Journal of American Medical Association, Vol. CLI, (March 21, 1953), p. 1031.

<sup>2</sup>Frances George and Ruth Kuehn, Patterns of Patient Care, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1955), p. 167.

<sup>3</sup>James E. Birren, Handbook of Aging and the Individual, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), p. 305.

In connection with this problem there is the growing necessity of caring for these people. "The need for more and better care of aged, disabled, and chronically ill people is being felt with increasing urgency everywhere."<sup>4</sup> Wallace states that, "The care of persons who are suffering from a chronic illness is one of the major health and welfare problems at the present time. The number of patients is large, and with the gradual aging of our population the number will become even greater. The skills of many professional disciplines and a wide variety of services are needed to provide comprehensive care for these persons."<sup>5</sup> As stated by the Commission on Chronic Illness, not only the numbers of professional personnel must be increased, but "educational programs must be revamped to produce personnel interested in and equipped to care for long-term illness."<sup>6</sup>

If a greater and greater number of nurses are to be involved in the care of aged and chronically ill patients, then nurses should know what illness means to old people, how it changes their lives, how it affects their personalities, and what circumstances produce the most satisfying adjustment

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<sup>4</sup>Edna E. Nicholson, Planning New Institutional Facilities for Long-Term Care, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), p. xi.

<sup>5</sup>Helen M. Wallace, "Meeting the Needs of the Chronically Ill," Social Casework, Vol. XL, (June, 1959), p. 321.

<sup>6</sup>Commission on Chronic Illness, Care of the Long-Term Patient, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 19.

to their illness. This requires not only a broad knowledge of physiological and psychological aspects of the aging process and of the diseases associated with aging, but a real interest in these patients and a true love for them.

One of the primary educational goals in nursing is to help the nursing student develop a sensitivity to the needs of patients and to develop an ability to meet these needs. The student has to be helped toward an understanding of her relations with patients, the attitudes she arouses in others, the attitudes in herself, and what motivates her behavior. The attitudes of nurses are important factors in promoting or retarding the progress of patients. Many of the nurse's physical acts of care other than technical procedures "are primarily significant to the patient as reflections of her attitude toward him."<sup>7</sup> Although many articles in professional journals stress the importance of, and the need for, desirable attitudes among nurses to work with the chronically ill and the aged, little, if anything, has been done to determine what attitudes nurses have toward this group of patients.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with determining the attitudes of a group of senior students in nursing toward aged patients

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<sup>7</sup>M. Johnson and H. Martin, "A sociological Analysis of the Nurse Role," American Journal of Nursing, Vol. LVIII, (March, 1958), p. 374.

with chronic illness.

### Justification of the Problem

The writer's interest in doing this study was stimulated by her experience in home care of the chronically ill and aged patients in her own country as well as in the United States. She also observed that the majority of nursing students with whom she had contact were not interested in caring for older patients with chronic illness.

It was hoped that the tool developed for this study would be one way of finding out the attitudes of the nursing students toward older patients. The writer also hoped to use this tool in doing a similar study in her own country. In addition, it was thought that the findings from this study would be a challenge for other persons to carry on similar studies in schools of nursing. This would then define in more detail students' attitudes toward older patients with chronic illness, and help to determine what modifications in nursing education might be necessary in order to secure high quality nursing service for these patients, and to help nurses have a more desirable attitude toward them.

### Scope and Limitations

The sample consisted of twenty-four senior students in the basic professional program of a collegiate school of nursing in New England. The findings are limited to this group, and no generalizations can be made to other students.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used as here defined:

Attitude.--An emotionalized tendency, developed through experience, to act toward a specific object in a particular way.

Chronic Illness.--A disease that requires medical supervision and nursing care over an extended period of time.

### Preview of Methodology

A questionnaire was developed to elicit attitudes about aged persons with chronic illness. The questionnaire was completed by twenty-four nursing students at the end of the first semester of their senior year. Data were analyzed and conclusions made.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

#### Review of the Literature

Although numerous studies on attitudes have been undertaken, as far as it could be determined, none have involved the attitudes of nursing students toward chronically ill aged patients. "The group of older people who are chronically ill has been largely ignored in the existing research," stated Margery Mack, in 1952, when presenting her study about the personal adjustment of old people with chronic illness under home care.<sup>1</sup>

By their manner and communication, nurses are capable of decreasing the pain and tensions of people who "need to be heroes every day" pointed out Barckley when discussing patients with cancer. She stressed how important an attitude of deep understanding and sincere interest in his condition was to the patient.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Margery J. Mack, "The Personal Adjustments of Chronically Ill Old People Under Home Care," Nursing Research, (June, 1952), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Virginia Barckley, "What Can I Say to the Cancer Patient?" Nursing Outlook, Vol. VI, (June, 1958), p. 316.

Murphy studied the attitudes of the professional nurse toward cancer, cancer nursing and cancer education, and tested the hypothesis that these attitudes differed in nurses working in various types of agencies. A questionnaire was answered by groups of five nurses in general hospitals, public health agencies, and specialized cancer hospitals. The findings were divided into two groups: the attitudes shown in the responses of a group or groups. Some of the individual feelings and statements were: cancer nursing is more pessimistic than other kinds of nursing; adjustment to cancer nursing is more difficult than nursing in other chronic diseases; it is difficult to talk to the cancer patient about his condition; if they did cancer nursing, they preferred older age patients to younger ones; although they appreciated the importance of the nurse's role, they were dissatisfied with the basic nursing education in this area. No group showed a consistently positive or negative pattern, but all groups expressed feelings about the inadequacy of their basic nursing education in cancer.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most informative studies relating to the attitudes of the nurse was done by Wage in relation to tuberculosis nursing. The purposes of the study were to discover whether nurses are reluctant to do tuberculosis nursing, and

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<sup>3</sup>Mary Elizabeth Murphy, "A Study of the Attitudes of Thirty Professional Nurses toward Cancer, Cancer Nursing, and Cancer Education," (unpublished Master's dissertation, Boston University School of Nursing, Boston, 1959).

to determine the implications of these attitudes. The hypotheses tested were that nurses feared tuberculosis and associated themselves with the disease, that fear produced certain attitudes in the nurses, and that some nurses had changed their attitude through education. A questionnaire was constructed and mailed to a 5 per cent sample of the total nurse population in general hospitals with state approved schools of nursing in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Seven significant categories of attitudes were reported. They were attitudes toward the disease, toward the tuberculosis patient, toward the influence of the family, toward the basic education in tuberculosis nursing, toward the personal health status and toward the field of employment and professional responsibilities. Under these categories, 55 factors affecting nurses' attitudes toward tuberculosis nursing were analyzed. During interviews with a smaller sample of nurses, the investigator observed that many nurses, because of a keen sense of loyalty to their school, did not wish to point up any defects in the educational program. The survey revealed that the roots of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with tuberculosis nursing were in five areas: employment, education, fear, health, and family opposition. Some of the findings were as follows: the patient's recovery is promoted by positive attitudes of nurses; the patients are able to sense nurses' feelings of apprehension; the nurses' choice of tuberculosis nursing often depends upon the experience in

their own family with tuberculosis; nurses lack knowledge about the opportunities available in the field of tuberculosis nursing; they lack accurate information about patients with tuberculosis. It was felt that the attitudes which influenced nurses' thoughts and behavior toward the tuberculosis patient could be traced back to the type of education provided, and to some extent, to the attitudinal climate in the school of nursing.<sup>4</sup>

The Commission on Chronic Illness stated in 1956, "The professional schools as a rule have failed to prepare physicians and nurses adequately for care of chronic sick, and have failed to inspire enthusiasm for such service. Only a beginning has been made in remedying this situation."<sup>5</sup> In recent years, some improvement in nursing instruction in the area of chronic illness and old age has occurred. In some instances, special programs were initiated. One of the earliest attempts of this nature was a program started in 1954 by Cornell University in New York City. A new experience in the care of the chronically ill was offered to the students in nursing. Patients were carefully selected on the basis of their age, disability or obstacles in recovery,

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<sup>4</sup>Helen Wago, "An Analysis of Expressed Attitudes of Registered Professional Nurses Toward Tuberculosis Nursing and the Implications of These Attitudes" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, New York University School of Education, 1955).

<sup>5</sup>Commission on Chronic Illness. op. cit.

rehabilitation goals and length of stay in the hospital. The experience lasted eight weeks, with care for patients three days a week, and participation in teamwork, weekly conferences and seminars. In 1956, this program was being evaluated with the assistance of National League of Nursing, with regard to students' attitudes, opinions, and gains.<sup>6</sup> No further information about the effectiveness of this program has been reported.

In 1957, the nursing faculty of Saint Anselm's College developed a four-week course of theory and experience in gerontology for senior nursing students. The course of instruction included lectures, conferences, demonstrations, clinical practice and field trips. It was expected that this program, together with the student's close contact with the elderly residents of the Mary Manning Walsh Home in New York City, would develop an understanding of the needs, interests, habits, limitations and capacities of the aged, and that this improved understanding would enable her to give better nursing care to elderly patients. Without exception, students believed they had achieved these goals and that a better understanding of the aged persons and their problems

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<sup>6</sup>Andrey M. McCluskey, "Students' Experience with Chronic Disease Patients," Nursing Outlook, Vol. IV, (March, 1956), pp. 170-72.

helped them function more effectively in all phases of nursing.<sup>7</sup>

More and more emphasis is put on the necessity of changing nurses' attitudes toward chronic illness and old age as such, and toward the patients with these conditions. People are concerned about the needs of chronically ill patients and about the needs of the aging citizens. Currently, Schwartz is doing a study to describe nursing needs of ambulant patients over sixty years of age with chronic illness.<sup>8</sup> Findings may reveal new information about the needs of these patients which can contribute to better care.

The literature pointed out that there is a connection between the nurse's attitude toward the patient, and her ability to communicate affects the relationship between the nurse and the patient and thus directly influences the nursing care.

#### Statement of Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is that nursing students prefer not to work with chronically ill aged patients.

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<sup>7</sup>Anita M. Routhier and Mother M. Bernadette de Lourdes, "Gerontology in the Basic Curriculum," Nursing Outlook, Vol. VII, (May, 1959), pp. 276-78.

<sup>8</sup>Doris Schwartz, "Nursing Needs of Chronically Ill Ambulatory Patients," Nursing Research, Vol. XIV, (Fall, 1960), pp. 185-88.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Selection and Description of Sample

Twenty-four senior students in a basic professional program of a collegiate school of nursing in New England participated in this study. The school offered a fully accredited program of four academic years. According to the curriculum plan of the school, senior students in the fourth year of their education had clinical experience in the following areas of nursing: psychiatric nursing, senior medical-surgical nursing, public health nursing, long-term illness nursing and community nursing. The class of twenty-four senior students was divided into five groups for rotation through the clinical areas; therefore, at the time the data were collected, the students had not all had similar clinical nursing experiences.

#### Tools Used to Collect Data

The method used to collect the data for this study was a questionnaire. The decision to use a questionnaire was determined by the fact that the writer had strong feelings about chronically ill and aged patients, and did not want to influence the answers given by the participants in the study. The

student was not identified in the questionnaire and thus had greater freedom in answering the questions than would have been the case had the questions been asked personally. In order to secure even greater objectivity of answers, the questionnaire was constructed in such a way that the main subject of the study was not revealed.

The questionnaire was developed from the investigator's experience in the home care of the chronically ill and aged patients, from her contact with the nursing students who expressed their dislike in nursing older patients with chronic illnesses, and from the literature.

The questionnaire<sup>1</sup> consisted of four parts. The first part had seven questions dealing with the student's personal data and her contact with elderly members with chronic illness in her own family. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of eight questions about the student's clinical experience in the school of nursing. Six of these questions were followed by open-ended "Why?" to secure explanations for given responses. The third part had fifteen statements for which students were to indicate agreement or disagreement. The statements aimed at eliciting some of the student's feelings about aged patients with chronic illness, as well as to test the consistency of responses given by the students. The fourth part was composed of seven questions: the first

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix

two referred to the student's learning experiences in the school of nursing and were followed by open-ended questions in order to elicit reasons supporting given answers; the next three questions were related to the clinical nursing experiences the student had in her nursing education; the last two questions had to do with the kinds of patients the student thought she would like to work with as a graduate nurse.

As a means of testing for clarity, the questionnaire was administered to three nurses enrolled in graduate study at the Boston University School of Nursing. As a result, three questions were reworded.

#### Procurement of Data

When the questionnaire was completed, a conference was held with the Chairman of the Basic Professional Program in the school of nursing. The subject and purpose of the study as well as the method for collection of data were discussed, and permission to conduct the study was obtained. The Chairman suggested dates when the whole group of senior students would meet for a class, and an instructor who would be interested in the study.

At the beginning of the class period, near the end of the first semester, the instructor announced that the questionnaire would be distributed. The investigator then asked the students for their cooperation and explained that there would

be no "right" or "wrong" answers. Anonymity was stressed and no time limit was given to the participants. The time used for completing the questionnaire varied from ten to twenty-two minutes. No information concerning the subject of the study was given until all questionnaires were filled out and returned. Then, at the request of a few students, the investigator revealed the subject and the purpose of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Presentation and Discussion of Data

The information obtained from the twenty-four students showed that the age of the students who participated in the study ranged from 21 to 25 years; fifteen were 22 years old. Thirteen participants had their permanent home in a suburban area, seven lived in cities, three lived in towns, and one lived in a rural area. Seven of the fathers were clerks; three were engineers; two were craftsmen; two were dentists; two were laborers; and there was one artist, one bus driver, one businessman, one minister, one pharmacist, one physician, and one policeman. One student did not answer the question. Thirteen of the mothers were housewives; two were clerks; one was a beautician; one a factory worker; one a nurse; one a pharmacist; and one a telephone operator. Two students did not answer the question.

In order to get information about students' contact with elderly members with chronic illness in their own families, the students were asked several questions about their immediate household. Five had lived with their grandparents for one year or more, but there was no indication that these elderly persons had any chronic illness that was taken care

of at home. Only three participants reported chronic illness in their immediate family (a mother, a father, a husband) where the patients were taken care of at home. Other students' family members with long-term illness were institutionalized.

The students were asked with what group of patients they had preferred to work during their clinical experience; in other words, what had been their preference when giving nursing care. The responses are categorized in Table 1.

TABLE 1

PREFERENCE FOR NURSING CARE DURING  
CLINICAL EXPERIENCE AS EXPRESSED  
BY TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS

Age Groups of Patients	Acute	Chronic	Total
Children	4	2	6
Young Adults	16	3	19
Aged	2	..	2
Total	22	5	27 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Some of the respondents gave more than one reply.

Twenty-two students preferred to care for patients with acute illness, sixteen giving preference to young adults. The main reason for this preference was that there was more hope of recovery. One student said: "Many chronically ill patients are incurable and aged, and there is limited

opportunity for rehabilitation and teaching"; other comments were: "there is more to do"; "more interesting and exciting." Five students preferred to care for patients with chronic illness, but none of these expressed preference for aged patients. This was an opposite finding from Murphy's which was that nurses working with cancer patients preferred that they be in the older age group.<sup>1</sup> The reason students gave for wanting to work with patients with chronic illness was mainly that they found it easier to establish relationships with children and young adults. Other students stated that, "inadequate knowledge to give care to patients with acute illness" was a drawback; they "did not like senile people"; and "old patients were annoying." However, two students said it was "rewarding work." From these comments it seemed to be evident that there was a poor relationship between some of the students and the aged patients.

The students were asked to indicate their choice of patients from a list of medical and surgical conditions. Table 2 illustrates the responses.

Fifteen gave postoperative conditions as their first choice, and seven indicated as their first choice the chronic conditions of arthritis, cancer, hemiplegia and Parkinson's disease. These chronic conditions were the third choice of

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<sup>1</sup>Murphy, op. cit., pp. 51, 53.

sixteen students, and none gave postoperative conditions as their third choice.

TABLE 2

RANK DISTRIBUTION OF THE PREFERENCE FOR CARE OF PATIENTS WITH ACUTE AND CHRONIC CONDITIONS AS EXPRESSED BY TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS

Type of Disease	Ranks				
	1	2	3	4	5 <sup>a</sup>
Arthritis	1	..	1	2	2
Asthma	..	..	..	..	1
Cancer	1	5	6	4	2
Diabetes Mellitus	..	4	4	3	4
Diarrhea	..	..	..	..	..
Food poisoning	..	..	..	2	..
Fractures	1	3	2	2	4
Hemiplegia	4	1	3	2	..
Hepatitis infectios	1	1	2	2	3
Otitis Media	..	..	..	..	2
Parkinson's disease	1	1	2	2	..
Pneumonia	..	6	4	4	3
Postoperative conditions	15	3	..	1	2

<sup>a</sup>One student did not indicate a fifth choice

Five ranked the care of patients with cancer, and four ranked the care of patients with diabetes as their second choice. There was no way of knowing what these students thought about these two types of disease in terms of acute or chronic conditions, since they could meet these patients in the hospital during the acute phase of the disease.

The four students who ranked hemiplegia as their first choice agreed that chronic illness nursing offered as great

an opportunity to use technical skill and knowledge as other branches of nursing; and three of these preferred to work with chronically ill young adults after graduation.

Table 3 shows the order in which the respondents preferred to give nursing care to various age groups of patients with chronic conditions. Only two students gave the care of aged patients with chronic illness as their last choice, thirteen gave as their first choice the care of patients from 20 to 39 years of age, but none indicated this group of patients as their last choice. The five students who had lived with aged members of their family for one year or more, ranked patients over 60 years of age in the third, fourth and fifth place.

TABLE 3

RANK DISTRIBUTION OF THE PREFERENCE FOR CARE OF VARIOUS AGE GROUPS OF PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS AS EXPRESSED BY TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS

Age Groups of Patients	Ranks				
	1	2	3	4	5
1 - 9	6	2	5	3	8
10 - 19	1	9	8	5	1
20 - 39	13	5	5	1	..
40 - 59	2	8	5	9	..
over 60	2	..	1	6	15

A comparison of the data of Tables 2 and 3 showed that there were fewer students who gave their first choice to

nursing aged patients with chronic illness than to the care of patients affected by chronic conditions of any age. It is to be noted, however, that in the fifth ranking by the students, the situation is reversed; more gave their last choice to the care of aged patients with chronic illness than to the care of patients of any age affected by chronic conditions. This makes one wonder if old age is not a factor which the students want to avoid in dealing with patients.

Fifteen students agreed that chronic illness nursing offers as great an opportunity to use technical skill and knowledge as other branches of nursing. Most of them justified their opinions by saying that it was challenging, that it provided opportunity for giving emotional support to the patient, that there was opportunity for teaching and that one could provide complete care to these patients.

Nine students who disagreed with the statement, gave the following reasons: "care becomes routine," "no hope for future," "less chance for ingenuity," "only supportive type of nursing," "other fields of nursing allow to use rehabilitation and teaching to greater and more useful degree." There were also expressions such as: "more emphasis on knowing the patient as a person," "offers opportunities of using other skills than physical," "technical skill secondary to relationship." These responses also indicated that the relationship with the patient was more important to these students than technical skill and knowledge.

The students were asked to designate the patients with whom they had had the most satisfying and most depressing experiences. Their responses are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4

PATIENTS WITH WHOM STUDENTS HAD THE MOST SATISFYING AND THE MOST DEPRESSING EXPERIENCES

Age Groups of Patients	Most Satisfying	Most Depressing	Total
Children	7	14	21
Young Adults	15	1	16
Aged	2	10	12
Total	24	25 <sup>a</sup>	49

<sup>a</sup>One student gave two answers

Fifteen students had their most satisfying experiences with young adults, and fourteen had their most depressing experiences with children. The aged were last in providing the most satisfying experiences, and second in providing the most depressing experiences.

Three of the five respondents who had lived with older members of the family for one year or more reported their most depressing experiences with aged patients.

The reasons given by the students who had the most satisfying experiences with children and young adults were that this group of patients was more responsive to nursing care

and to teaching, and that it was easier to establish a relationship with them. The reasons for the most depressing experiences were their own emotions which interfered with nursing care. Some comments were: "the tremendous grief of hospitalized children and young people," and "the incapacitation of those who enjoy life so much and want to see it fruitful."

The students who found the most depressing experience in working with aged patients said, "death is more inevitable," "their diseases are usually chronic," and "regression in personality more noticeable."

There might be some connection between the students' experience with elderly members of their families, and their attitudes toward aged patients. This, in turn, could influence their decisions as to future work. This would go along with Wago's findings that the nurse's choice of tuberculosis nursing often depends upon the experience in her own family with tuberculosis.<sup>2</sup> Since there is not enough evidence in this study to prove this point, further investigation is needed.

The students were asked with what age group they thought they could communicate best. The responses are listed in table 5.

The majority of the respondents said they communicated better with young adults, four felt they were more successful

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<sup>2</sup>Wago, op. cit.

with children, and none felt that they communicated easily with elderly patients. The predominant reasons were that the students had more in common with children and young adults and thus found it easier to relate to them. This, again, showed that most of the students put emphasis on the relationship with patients, and that the age of patients was the determining factor in the success of this relationship.

TABLE 5

OPINIONS OF THE STUDENTS CONCERNING  
THEIR COMMUNICATION WITH DIFFERENT  
AGE GROUPS OF PATIENTS

Age Groups of Patients	Number of Replies <sup>a</sup>
Children.....	4
Young Adults.....	18
Aged.....	..
Total	22

<sup>a</sup>Some students gave more than one answer;  
three students did not answer the question.

The participants were asked to state the type of nursing care for which they were most adequately prepared and least adequately prepared. Their opinions are illustrated in Table 6.

Twenty of the students considered themselves prepared most adequately for the care of acutely ill young adults, and fifteen thought they had the most adequate preparation in the

care of aged patients with chronic conditions. The main reason they gave was that they had had more experience in clinical nursing with these groups of patients.

TABLE 6

STUDENTS' OPINIONS CONCERNING THE ADEQUACY OF THEIR  
PREPARATION FOR NURSING PATIENTS WITH  
DIFFERENT AGE AND ILLNESSES

Age Groups of Patients	Preparation				Total
	Most Adequate		Least Adequate		
	Acute	Chronic	Acute	Chronic	
Children	13	3	3	12	31
Young Adults	20	5	..	10	35
Aged	5	15	6	2	28
Total	38	23	9	24	94

Twelve thought that they had the least adequate preparation in the care of children with chronic diseases, but only two felt that their preparation had been inadequate in the care of aged patients with chronic conditions. Their main reason was the lack of sufficient experience with such groups of patients. One student stated that she lacked knowledge about the problems of aged patients with chronic illness. Two students felt they were adequately prepared in all areas of nursing.

Analysis of Table 6 showed that the students differed in opinions about the adequacy of their preparation for nursing the patients of various age groups and types of diseases. This might be a result of their not having had equal experience at the time of answering the questionnaire. Furthermore, the data related to the students' preparations might be biased due to loyalty to their school, which would be similar to that shown in Wago's study.<sup>3</sup> There the investigator observed that many nurses, because of a keen sense of loyalty to their school, did not wish to point out any defects in the educational program.

When they become graduate nurses the majority of students said that they will want to work with young adults who are acutely ill. This was consistent with their opinions about the adequacy of their preparation in this area.

A different picture was found in nursing aged patients with chronic conditions. Only five expressed a desire for this kind of work after graduation, although fifteen students felt that they were prepared most adequately for the care of these patients.

Table 7 shows that the students' last choice for future work was the care of children with chronic conditions. This seemed to be consistent with their opinions concerning the

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<sup>3</sup>Wago, op. cit.

adequacy of their preparation. Although adequately prepared to care for the aged with chronic illness, they did not want to work with this group after graduation.

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS' STATEMENTS CONCERNING THEIR CHOICE FOR WORK AFTER GRADUATION ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP OF PATIENTS AND TYPE OF DISEASE

Age Groups of Patients	Most		Least		Total
	Acute	Chronic	Acute	Chronic	
Children	9	1	7	12	29
Young Adults	21	8	1	6	36
Aged	4	5	6	10	25
Total	34	14	14	28	90

The opinions about the opportunities for using technical skills and knowledge in chronic illness nursing compared with the students' preparation and choice of work as graduate nurses also seemed to indicate that chronic illness itself was not the decisive factor which influenced the students' decision concerning their future work.

The students were asked to express their opinions about fifteen statements by checking "Yes" or "No". Their responses are summarized in Table 8.

**TABLE 8**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS' AGREEMENT AND**  
**DISAGREEMENT WITH FIFTEEN STATEMENTS**

Statement	Yes	No	No Answer
My experience in health teaching was the most effective with children .....	1	22	1
I found nursing of patients with chronic illness monotonous .....	8	15	1
I noticed that sick aged persons were more understanding and patient than the younger ones .....	2	21	1
I found nursing of patients with chronic illness a challenging experience .....	14	9	1
I feel more comfortable working with patients of my own age group .....	14	9	1
I found limited opportunities for teaching patients over 60 years of age .....	12	12	..
I usually communicated better with the older than with younger patients .....	5	18	1
I usually felt uncomfortable talking with the chronically ill patients .....	1	23	..
I do not like to care for patients with poor prognosis .....	5	20	..
The habits and mannerism of aged patients are irritating .....	8	15	1
I was able to maintain the best relationship with acutely ill patients .....	14	9	1
I found that patients with chronic illness are unusually demanding of attention .....	12	13	..
I had to force myself to be cheerful while caring for old people .....	4	20	..

TABLE 8 --Continued

Statement	Yes	No	No Answer
I found nursing care for chronically ill old patients as challenging and satisfying as nursing children with chronic illness ...	9	15	..
I found nursing procedures involved in the care of patients with chronic illness tedious and time consuming .....	9	15	..

Two participants agreed as well as disagreed with two statements; one student with the statement, "I do not like to care for patients with poor prognosis," and another student with the statement, "I found that patients with chronic illness are unusually demanding of attention."

Again, the relationships with the age group of patients were confirmed by the following data: twenty-two disagreed with the statement that their experience in health teaching was most effective with children; twelve found limited opportunities for teaching the patients over 60 years of age; and eighteen disagreed with the statement, "I usually communicated better with the older than with the younger patients." Most of the students declared that they felt more comfortable working with patients in their own age group. This was an interesting finding because they did not mind the habits and mannerisms of old patients and were comfortable with them.

There was consistency in findings relating to the care

of patients with chronic conditions. The majority of students found this kind of nursing challenging. They felt comfortable when talking with chronically ill patients, which was contrary to the finding obtained by Murphy that nurses found it difficult to talk with the cancer patient about his condition.<sup>4</sup> Half of the participants stated, however, that this group of patients was unusually demanding of attention.

The majority of the students disagreed with the statement that nursing care of chronically ill aged patients was as challenging and satisfying as nursing of children with chronic illness. Twenty-one students disagreed with the statement that sick aged persons were more understanding and patient than the younger ones.

It seemed to be clear that it was not their preparation or the chronic illness itself, but the difficulty in communication due to old age that was the factor which made the difference in their choice of patients.

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<sup>4</sup>Murphy, op. cit., pp. 51, 53

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The lengthening of the life span and the growing numbers of the aged population affected by chronic conditions have created an urgent need for nurses to work in this field. The literature has stressed the importance of the nurse's attitude toward the patient, because this determines the kind of relationship established with him. It was the writer's experience that nursing students preferred not to work with the chronically ill aged patients, and this was the hypothesis underlying the study. The twenty-four senior nursing students in a basic professional program of a collegiate school of nursing in New England provided the data. A questionnaire was used to elicit information that would help to determine their attitudes toward aged patients with chronic illness.

The most significant findings can be summarized as follows:

1. None of the students during the clinical nursing experience preferred to care for aged patients with chronic illness.
2. None gave as their last choice the care of patients with chronic conditions in the age group from 20 to 39 years.

3. Eighteen said they communicated better with young adults in comparison with other age groups of patients.
4. None said they communicated better with aged patients than with other age groups.
5. Twenty said they had been prepared most adequately for the care of young adults with acute illness.
6. None said they were least adequately prepared for the care of young adults with acute illness.
7. Twenty-one indicated they would prefer to work, after graduation, with young adults with acute illness.
8. Eighteen disagreed with the statement: "I usually communicated better with the older than with younger patients."
9. Twenty-one disagreed with the statement that sick aged persons were more understanding and patient than the young ones.

### Conclusions

There seemed to be consistency between:

1. The students' preparation for the care of young adults with acute illness and of children with chronic conditions, and the students' preference for work after graduation.
2. The students' preference for care of various age groups of patients with chronic conditions during their clinical nursing experience, and the students' choice of work after graduation.
3. The students' ability to communicate and establish relationship with different age groups of patients, and the students' satisfying or depressing experience with these patients.
4. The students' ability to communicate and to relate with different age groups of patients, and their choice of work after graduation.

There seemed to be an inconsistency between:

1. The students' preparation for the care of aged patients with chronic illness, and the preference for work after graduation.
2. The students' statements about the care of aged patients, and the students' choice of work after graduation.

It seemed not to be the preparation and not the chronic illness but the ability to communicate and to maintain relationship with patients that were decisive in the students' choice for nursing after graduation. The findings showed that old age was the factor that created the difficulty in the students' communication with patients. This, however, could be considered as a result of the students' attitudes toward aged patients. Chronic conditions, preferred less by the students for nursing than acute illnesses, when combined with the aged patient seemed to increase the undesirability for the students. This seemed to give an explanation as to why the majority of students preferred not to work with the chronically ill aged patients. Since the hypothesis of the study was that nursing students prefer not to work with chronically ill aged patients, the findings confirmed the hypothesis.

#### Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are presented:

1. That similar studies be done in other schools of

nursing to define in detail:

- a. students' attitudes toward aged patients with chronic illness, and to compare with findings of this study
  - b. the difference between freshmen and senior students' attitudes toward this group of patients
  - c. the difference between the attitudes of students from various nursing programs
  - d. the relationship between these attitudes and various factors that possibly could influence the attitudes, such as: contact with aged persons and chronically ill persons in their own family; the atmosphere in the school, the hospital, the agency; the adequacy of preparation, etc.
2. That the tool be improved in order to elicit more accurate information.
  3. That findings obtained from further studies be used to find out what, if any, modifications in nursing education might be made.

**APPENDIX**

QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Please write or check answers to the following questions:

1. Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is your permanent home in a

- \_\_\_\_\_ city
- \_\_\_\_\_ town
- \_\_\_\_\_ suburban area
- \_\_\_\_\_ rural area

3. While you were at home - which of the following lived in your immediate household for one year or more?

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| _____ Mother   | _____ Grandmothers |
| _____ Father   | _____ Grandfathers |
| _____ Brothers | _____ Others       |
| _____ Sisters  |                    |

4. Main occupation of your father: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Main occupation of your mother: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Family health record:

Member of Family	Approx. Age	Major Illnesses	If Deceased	
			Approx. age of Death	Cause of Death
Mother	_____	_____	_____	_____
Father	_____	_____	_____	_____
Brothers	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sisters	_____	_____	_____	_____
Maternal:				
Grandmother	_____	_____	_____	_____
Grandfather	_____	_____	_____	_____
Paternal:				
Grandmother	_____	_____	_____	_____
Grandfather	_____	_____	_____	_____
Others	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Has any of your immediate household had a long term illness (lasting 90 days or more)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, complete the following:

Member	Illness	Where Cared For		
		Home	Hospital	Other Institution
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

II. Please answer the following questions by checking or writing responses:

1. If you had a choice - what group of patients would you prefer to work with?

\_\_\_\_\_ Acutely ill  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Chronically ill

Why?

2. During your experience in the School of Nursing - what group of patients did you most prefer working with?

\_\_\_\_\_ Children  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Young adults  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Aged

Why?

3. Some nurses prefer to care for patients with surgical conditions, others with medical conditions. If you could choose patients, - in what order would you select them from the following illnesses? (Mark five of them from 1 to 5, number 1 being for your first choice).

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| _____ Arthritis                | _____ Fractures             |
| _____ Asthma                   | _____ Hemiplegia            |
| _____ Cancer                   | _____ Hepatitis, infectious |
| _____ Diabetes Mellitus        | _____ Otitis Media          |
| _____ Diarrhea                 | _____ Parkinson's disease   |
| _____ Food poisoning           | _____ Pneumonia             |
| _____ Postoperative conditions |                             |

4. Suppose that the following age groups of patients had the common characteristics of chronicity such as, limitation of function and interference with self-support. Rank the age groups in order of your preference for nursing. (Mark them from 1 to 5, number 1 being for your first choice).

<u>Age Group of Patients</u>	<u>Rank Number</u>
1 - 9	_____
10 - 19	_____
20 - 39	_____
40 - 59	_____
over 60	_____

5. Some people feel that chronic illness nursing offers as great an opportunity to use technical skill and knowledge as other branches of nursing. What do you think about this?

\_\_\_\_\_ Agree  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Disagree

Why?

6. During my experience in the School of Nursing, I found the most satisfying experience in caring for sick

\_\_\_\_\_ children  
 \_\_\_\_\_ young adults  
 \_\_\_\_\_ aged

Why?

7. I found the most depressing experience in caring for sick

\_\_\_\_\_ children  
 \_\_\_\_\_ young adults  
 \_\_\_\_\_ aged

Why?

8. I feel that I can communicate better with

\_\_\_\_\_ children  
 \_\_\_\_\_ young adults  
 \_\_\_\_\_ aged

Why?

III. Please encircle "yes" if the statement is true for you, or "no" if the statement is not true for you.

- Yes No 1. My experience in health teaching was the most effective with children.
- Yes No 2. I found nursing of patients with chronic illness monotonous.
- Yes No 3. I noticed that sick aged persons were more understanding and patient than the younger ones.
- Yes No 4. I found nursing of patients with chronic illness a challenging experience.
- Yes No 5. I feel more comfortable working with patients of my own age group.
- Yes No 6. I found limited opportunities for teaching patients over 60 years of age.
- Yes No 7. I usually communicated better with the older than with younger patients.
- Yes No 8. I usually felt uncomfortable talking with the chronically ill patients.
- Yes No 9. I do not like to care for patients with poor prognosis.
- Yes No 10. The habits and mannerism of aged patients are irritating.
- Yes No 11. I was able to maintain the best relationship with acutely ill patients.
- Yes No 12. I found that patients with chronic illness are unusually demanding of attention.
- Yes No 13. I had to force myself to be cheerful while caring for old people.
- Yes No 14. I found nursing care for chronically ill old patients as challenging and satisfying as nursing children with chronic illness.
- Yes No 15. I found nursing procedures involved in the care of patients with chronic illness tedious and time consuming.

IV. Please write or check answers to the following questions:

1. For which type of nursing care do you think you have been prepared most adequately?

	<u>Acute Illness</u>	<u>Chronic Illness</u>
Children	_____	_____
Young adults	_____	_____
Aged	_____	_____
Why?		

2. For which type of nursing care do you think you have been prepared least adequately?

	<u>Acute Illness</u>	<u>Chronic Illness</u>
Children	_____	_____
Young adults	_____	_____
Aged	_____	_____
Why?		

3. List clinical areas in which you have already had experience.

4. What was your last clinical assignment?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Have you had a field instruction in the public health nursing?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

6. Which patients do you think you will least like to work with as a graduate nurse?

	<u>Acute Illness</u>	<u>Chronic Illness</u>
Children	_____	_____
Young adults	_____	_____
Aged	_____	_____

7. Which patients do you think you will most like to work with as a graduate nurse?

	<u>Acute Illness</u>	<u>Chronic Illness</u>
Children	_____	_____
Young adults	_____	_____
Aged	_____	_____

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