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The Role of Allied Health Professionals

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Background: Having been in the medical field for close to 20 years since starting my medical school in 1998, I have always appreciated the role of allied health professionals, notably staff nurses and medical assistants (known also as assistant medical officer) in helping out physician in ensuring patients receive the best health care services.

Both this group of staffs are designated different kind of duties. Staff nurses are usually given the task to take care of patient's need from nutrition to serving of medication while medical assistant, who are mainly working in the emergency unit of a clinic or hospital, are in charge of triaging patient and taking of blood specimens.

Methods and Results: Over the years, one issue seems to trouble me. While the role of medical assistant remains the same, the role of the staff nurses has somewhat been reduced. The duties of taking blood, setting of intravenous drips and given stat drugs through the intravenous route have been "shifted" to physicians.

Part of the reduced duties can be attributed to nursing teaching curriculum which had slashed this important component. I have over the years ask nursing students who have confirmed this rather drastic curriculum shift. While agreeing that physician can help in taking blood and setting up of intravenous drips, the division of duties can further create a gap between physician and nurses that will have an influence on the working relationship.

I feel training in blood taking and setting up of intravenous drips still needs to be incorporated in nurses' training as these nurses may be posted to rural areas where they may be alone in charge of a smaller health unit called village / rural clinic where they may encounter pregnant ladies with urgent need of intravenous hydration e.g., in cases of ectopic pregnancy and placenta previa and nearest help may be about 10-15 minutes away. Even if these nurses work in an urban hospital and clinic, their skills will be an invaluable asset in helping reducing the physician loads, especially during on-call duties.

Conclusion: What hold forth is still high-quality patient care. The healthcare team needs to work together to achieve these aims. Over times the load of patients will increase and therefore I feel everyone should upgrade and share their expertise in managing patients.

Biography

Dr. Navin Kumar Devaraj is a senior lecturer and Family Medicine Specialist at Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He has published more than 30 articles in peer-reviewed journal. His area of interest is hypertension and stroke. He has work with various allied health department including nursing, occupational health and environmental health departments.