A Short History of Bellevue School Of Nursing

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6/1/2021
On January 26, 1872, a number of ladies met at the home of Miss Louisa Lee Schuyler to organize a committee to visit the public hospitals of the City and County of New York, and report upon their condition to the State Board of Charities. For many months sixty of the most intelligent women to be found in the city daily passed hours in the wards of Bellevue, carefully considering its conditions and consulting the highest hospital authorities. The members of the Bellevue Association could not patiently witness the ignorance and brutality which daily fell under their eyes, and they applied to the Commissioners of Charities for permission to establish a school for nurses at Bellevue Hospital.

The first step to be taken was to learn what a training school was, and as it was considered important that the information should be obtained at headquarters, Dr. W. Gill Wylie, then a house surgeon at Bellevue, offered to go to Europe at his own expense and bring back a report. Dr. Wylie was one of the first men in his profession to assist in this work, while many, who realized that a reform in hospital service was necessary, argued that a pauper hospital was no place for a refined and intelligent woman.

One distinguished surgeon said, "I do not believe in the success of a training school for nurses at Bellevue Hospital. The patients, as a general thing, are such a difficult class to deal with, and the service is so hard that the conscientious, intelligent woman you are looking for will lose heart and hope long before the two years are over."

Dr. Wylie returned from Europe in the autumn of 1872, bringing an interesting report of the Schools in England, France and Germany, and, above all, a letter of encouragement and advice from Florence Nightingale to establish the School. The project was received with enthusiasm, and in six weeks $22,385.00 were contributed.

From the Commissioners of the Board of Charities a reluctant consent was obtained to nurse five wards at Bellevue, the committee defraying all expense beyond what was paid under the old
system. In March, 1873, a house was hired in the vicinity of the hospital, as a home for the nurses, and a circular was issued inviting pupils to apply.

At the end of several weeks six pupils were obtained, and Sister Helen, of The All Saints Sisterhood in London, became Superintendent.

At the end of the first year the house staff ventured to point out to their superiors the improved condition of the nursing service, and gradually these gentlemen became convinced that their patients recovered sooner and that the deaths after operations were less frequent than formerly.

During the second year the work was extended to other wards, the applications from would-be pupils increased, and at the close of the second year the first class graduated.

In May, 1876, Sister Helen returned to England, and Miss Eliza Perkins, of Norwich, Connecticut, was placed in charge. Of Miss Perkins it has been said, "She studied the character and abilities of her pupils, knew the position each woman was adapted to fill, and, as class after class graduated, she sent them far and wide over the country to carry the results of their education into hospitals and homes."

Early training involved only instruction in basic cleanliness, neatness, and attending to patient comfort, but by the late 1870s doctors from Bellevue Hospital began to give lectures in Anatomy, Physiology, and Hygiene. The Training School grew rapidly; by 1879 there were 63 enrolled students and more applicants than could be accepted. The first official building for the school, that included both classroom space and student rooms, opened in 1878 at 426 E. 26th Street. The building was purchased by Mrs. William Henry Osborn and leased to the Board of Managers of the Bellevue Training School for Nurses, and it was known initially as the "Nurse's Home."

There was no established uniform in the early years of the school, but by the 1880s the blue and white striped fabric was adopted as the uniform fabric, with the style left to the discretion of the individual student.

The Bellevue school pin, was adopted in 1880 and worn by graduates; it portrayed a crane, representing vigilance, surrounded by a wreath of poppies, signifying the role of nurses of allaying pain and bringing rest to the suffering. The unbroken circle of blue, with the word "Bellevue" at the bottom, represented constancy.
In 1909 the nursing school and the student residence moved to a new building at 440 E. 26th Street. This building continued to be used until 1954. The former school building at 426 E. 26th Street was attached to a new six-story structure and renamed Osborn Hall in honor of the donors, Mr. and Mrs. William Church Osborn. This building was leased to the Alumnae Association, who managed the Alumnae Registry from there, and served as a residence for graduate nurses. Osborn Hall also included a restaurant and an assembly room.

Appendix:

Excerpts from Letter to Dr. Gill Wylie from Florence Nightingale

"Nurses are not" medical men' On the contrary, the nurses are there, and solely there, to carry out the orders of the medical and surgical staff including, of course, the whole practice of cleanliness, fresh air, diet, etc. The whole organization of discipline to which the nurses must be subjected is to carry out intelligently and faithfully such orders and such duties as constitute the whole practice of nursing. They are in no sense medical men. Their duties can never clash with medical duties. Their whole training is to enable them to understand how best to carry out medical and surgical orders, including, as above the whole art of cleanliness, ventilation, food, etc., etc., and the reason why this is to be done this way and not that way. " ' And for this very purpose-that is, in order that they may be competent to execute medical directions, to be nurses and not doctors- they must be, for discipline and internal management, entirely under a woman a trained superintendent whose whole business is to see that the nursing duties are performed according to this standard. For this purpose may I say: " '

1. That the nursing of hospitals, including the carrying out of medical officers' orders, must be done to the satisfaction of the medical officers, whose orders regarding the sick are to be carried out. And we may depend upon it that the highly trained, intelligent nurse and cultivated, moral woman will do this better than the ignorant, stupid woman, for ignorance is always headstrong.

' 2. That all desired changes, reprimands, etc., etc., in the nursing and for the nurses should be referred by medical officers to the superintendent. "That rules which make the matron (superintendent) and nurses responsible to the house surgeons or medical or surgical staffs, except in the sense of carrying out current medical orders above insisted
upon are always found fatal to nursing discipline. That if the medical officers have fault to find, it is bad policy for them to reprimand the nurses themselves. The medical staff must carry all considerable complaints to the matron; the current complaints, as, for instance, that a patient has been neglected or an order mistaken, to the ward sister or the head nurse who must always accompany the medical officer on his visits, receive his orders, and be responsible for their being carried out.

3. All discipline must be under the matron (superintendent) and ward sisters, or otherwise nursing becomes impossible. ("And here I should add that, unless there is, so to speak, a hierarchy of women, as thus:

    Matron or Superintendent
    Sisters or Head Nurses,
    Assistant and Night Nurses,
    Ward Maids or Scrubbers,

or whatever other grades are, locally, considered more appropriate, discipline becomes impossible. "'s In this hierarchy the higher grade ought always to know the duties of the lower better than the lower grade does itself. And so on to the head. Otherwise, how will they be able to train? Moral influence alone will not make a good trainer.

It seems extraordinary that this first essential viz., that women should be, in matters of discipline, under a woman, should need to be advocated at all. But so it is.

"And I can add my testimony, as regards another vast hospital in Germany, to the abominable effects of nurses being directly responsible, not to a matron, but to the economic staff and medical staff of their hospital. And I am told on the highest authority that since my time things have only got worse. "' But I will not take up your time and my own with more general remarks, which may not prove, after all, applicable to your special case.... "' Again begging you to command me if I can be of any use for your great purpose, to which I wish every success and ever-increasing progress, pray believe me, sir.

"' Ever your faithful servant,
Florence Nightingale
References

i https://archives.med.nyu.edu/collections/bellevue-school-nursing Text courtesy of the Foundation of New York State Nurses. For information see the Foundation's collection of Bellevue Schools of Nursing records

ii Bellevue: a Short History of Bellevue Hospital and of the Training Schools; published by the Alumnae Association of Bellevue Pension Fund Committee December, 1915 Book downloaded from Archive.org 5/2021


iv https://archives.med.nyu.edu/collections/bellevue-school-nursing

v ibid

vi Text courtesy of the Foundation of New York State Nurses. For information see the Foundation's collection of Bellevue Schools of Nursing records. https://archives.med.nyu.edu/collections/bellevue-school-nursing

vii History of the Reform in Nursing in Bellevue Hospital Author(s): L. L. Dock Source: The American Journal of Nursing, Nov., 1901, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Nov., 1901), pp. 89 – 98 This content downloaded from 70.181.5.18 on Sun, 30 May 2021 15:45:56 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms