

Outlook on Lifestyle

DR. GOTT



Peter Gott, M.D.

Nursing profession deserves respect

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

The health-care profession resembles an anthill: A complex community made up of thousands of individuals scurrying hither and yon, who perform dozens of tasks for the good of the inhabitants. In order for the alliance to run smoothly and accomplish its goals, the participants must work in a coordinated and interlocking manner. When one part of the organization is threatened, the whole system is put in peril.

Judging from my hospital experience and from what I've read, the nursing profession — traditionally a vital and necessary component of health care — is in trouble. And, sooner or later, this trouble is going to affect doctors and patients.

The bases for what some experts have termed the "nursing crisis" appear to be poor working conditions and job dissatisfaction. There are a number of reasons for this.

Nursing is a dangerous profession. Nurses are at high risk of contracting the very disease they are helping patients to handle. For example, AIDS patients now occupy about

5 percent of New York City hospital beds, and this figure will almost certainly rise in the next decade, both for urban and rural hospitals.

Nursing is a poorly paid profession. According to columnist George F. Will, writing in Newsweek magazine, salaries start at about \$21,000. Experienced nurses rarely earn more than \$30,000 annually, even after years of dedicated service. This travesty of advancement may be an important reason for the declining pool of young people who choose a nursing career.

Nursing has become increasingly contaminated by record-keeping and trivial administrative duties. There is less patient care, the *raison d'être* of most nurses, the hands-on rewarding activity that draws most applicants to the profession.

Nursing is fraught with increasingly less job satisfaction, as nurses find themselves caught between insensitive doctors and a more demanding public. Many MDs continue to view nurses as handmaidens whose role is to take orders. When qualified nurses request and expect more responsibility, the frightened and defensive healers refuse to accept this changing orientation.

Pressure from the public sector is equally conspicuous. Patients are more seriously sick and require more individualized care than ever before. However, because of cost-containment measures in hospitals (where 85 percent of nurses work), nurses may be in short supply. Also, patients may either take longer to be healed or are discharged feeling more unwell than was the case a few years ago.

Nurses are "falling off the candy curve." This means that as patients

are discharged before they are completely cured, they no longer reach the point of recovery where they buy candy for the nursing staff. This candy-curve concept may seem inconsequential, but, according to Dr. Philip Alper in Medical World News magazine, it reflects the general lack of recognition given to today's nurses. While the metaphor may seem glib, it accurately characterizes a deep-seated work satisfaction problem.

Thus, the anthill simile is not far from the truth. If the nursing underpinning gives way, the whole enterprise — as we know it — will fall into disarray. You can't run a hospital without a contingent of nurses. This reality has been amply demonstrated when, on past occasions, nurses have gone out on strike.

Claire Fagan (professor and dean, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania) warns that nursing is becoming an "invisible profession," composed of disenfranchised citizens "for whom there is a lack of public and political outrage." We are facing a nursing shortage because of an alarming drop in the numbers of qualified people seeking nursing training. This shortage will eventually translate into declining levels of quality medical care.

Will concluded: "Someday when you are in a hospital... and ring for a nurse, she will not come, or be as attentive, as you and she would wish. And the chances are, aging reader, that the day will come when you will ring."

In short, we must give nurses the recognition and respect that they have so amply earned during their many years of service to people who need help.

POLLY'S POINTERS



Polly Fisher

Herbs in a dog's bed fend off fleas

By Polly Fisher

DEAR POLLY — What herbs are supposed to be repellent to fleas? How can these be used with a dog? — L.T.

DEAR L.T. — Pennyroyal is most often recommended as a natural flea repellent. Other herbs that are supposed to be helpful in keeping your pet flea-proof are thyme, wormwood and rosemary. You can sew some pennyroyal, plus a mixture of the herbs into a pillow for your dog's bed, or you can grid them into a powder to rub into the dog's coat (don't get any of it into the animal's eyes!). I prefer the pillow method myself; it's neater, cleaner and less potentially irritating to your pet.

Some people also assert that a daily spoonful of nutritional yeast, mixed into your dog's food, will help keep the dog flea-proof. It can't hurt — and it might help.

Finally, frequent combing, hand-picking of the fleas out of your dog's

coat, bathing and general good hygiene are helpful. Any dog who goes outside regularly is bound to pick up occasional fleas. With good hygiene and the flea preventatives mentioned above, you should be able to keep the population under control. — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — When in a busy Laundromat, I place a brightly colored plastic hanger on each washing machine I am using.

Since I do six to 12 loads at a time, I usually have to put my laundry in machines in several different locations. It used to be frustrating to relocate my clothes. Once I left a load of white clothes in the machine and, to my chagrin, someone took them before I discovered my error later that day. Now I just look for the machines I've marked with my pink and red hangers! — HEIDI

DEAR POLLY — When using a paint roller tray for a paint job, place the tray inside a plastic shopping bag, then pour the paint into the bag-covered tray. When you're done, just remove the plastic bag, and your tray will be clean. The plastic won't tear while you're dipping the roller into the paint, and this completely eliminates cleanup! — W.M.R.

DEAR W.M.R. — Wow, this really saves you from the messy job of washing up the trays! Your helpful pointer earns you the Pointer of the Week award, a copy of my book "Polly's Pointers: 1,081 Helpful Hints for Making Everything Last Longer." Others may order it for \$6.50. Make your check payable to POLLY'S POINTERS and send to POLLY'S POINTERS, P.O. Box 93863, Cleveland, OH 44101-5863. — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — I had a videocassette tape I wanted erased. So, I put it in my VCR, selected a channel not in use in our area, and turned on the VCR to record. The tape came out completely erased like a new one. — G.K.

DEAR POLLY — Everyone knows how hard it is to apply creams or sun screen lotion to your back when there is no one around to help. I make little

mitten out of worn towels and place one over my back brush. I apply the cream to the mitt; it's so easy to reach my back this way.

Before you clean house, cut the fingers off old rubber gloves and place them over your mop and broom handle tips. There will be no more marks on your wall when you lean the mop or broom against it. — G.

DEAR POLLY — Odors can be removed from plastic containers by adding cream of tartar to water in the container and letting it sit for a short time.

Add a scant teaspoon of baking soda to the milk used in scalloped potatoes and ham, and there's no curdling. — GRACE



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