COURSES IN CLINICAL NURSING FOR GRADUATE NURSES

Basic Assumptions and Guiding Principles
Basic Courses
Advanced Courses

Pamphlet No. 1

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF NURSING EDUCATION
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Prepared by

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON POSTGRADUATE CLINICAL NURSING COURSES

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FOREWORD

The National League of Nursing Education appointed in July, 1943, a Special Committee on Postgraduate Clinical Nursing Courses. Its membership represented the Association of Collegiate Schools of Nursing, the National Organization for Public Health Nursing, the American Journal of Nursing, the National League of Nursing Education, the Joint Orthopedic Nursing Advisory Service, and several universities offering professional curricula in nursing.

One of the major objectives of the committee was the classification of postgraduate clinical nursing courses and the determination of basic principles for their construction and evaluation. This has now been accomplished, thereby making it possible for the committee to undertake the construction of advanced courses in various clinical areas in accordance with these principles. This series includes advanced clinical courses in psychiatric nursing, pediatric nursing, orthopedic nursing, and tuberculosis nursing.

The material here presented may be found useful to institutions that are revising existing clinical courses or are contemplating new ones. It may also be of service as a guide to the nurse who is seeking the best means of qualifying as a clinical specialist or for any position for which preparation as an expert practitioner is essential.

In the process of preparing this report the literature of general and professional education was intensively studied and the opinions of nurses with wide experience in clinical nursing were secured. A tentative formulation of principles and criteria was then sent to a selected list of hospitals, universities, and individuals with the request that they review it critically and submit any suggestions they might have. On the basis of the replies a revision of the principles and criteria was made and published in the American Journal of Nursing. A further critical review was requested of directors of programs in nursing education throughout the country. This report represents the final revision made after comments submitted had been considered.

To all those who have in any way assisted in this project the committee wishes at this time to express its sincere gratitude. Without the wide participation which took place, the committee would have been unable to produce a statement which carried with it the authority of the present report.

Elizabeth K. Porter, Chairman

October, 1945
COURSES IN CLINICAL NURSING
FOR GRADUATE NURSES

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The whole question of providing advanced preparation in clinical nursing for graduate nurses has recently taken on a new and urgent significance. Rapid expansion of group hospitalization calls for the services of an increasingly large number of professional nurses who are specially skilled in giving bedside care in specific clinical areas. There is an insistent demand for well-qualified clinical instructors, supervisors, and head nurses. Public health nurses, also, need advanced clinical preparation, especially in such fields as tuberculosis, psychiatry, and orthopedics. Even under ordinary circumstances these needs were never fully met, and the enormous demands of the war years have further depleted the ranks of the younger nurses who might have filled the gap. Furthermore, many institutions are now unable to obtain the services of sufficient graduate nurses and are employing large numbers of practical nurses and other auxiliary workers. The fact that within their limitations these women are rendering acceptable service constitutes a challenge to professional nursing which should not altogether be ignored.

At this particular juncture it is extremely important that advanced preparation should be provided for nurses who wish to qualify themselves for teaching and supervision in a given clinical area. In the past, for want of something better, such preparation has usually taken the form of a superstructure, composed of courses in teaching and supervision, imposed on inadequate knowledge of and experience in clinical nursing itself. As a result, head nurses, teachers, and supervisors have often found themselves in the difficult position of knowing something about how to teach without sufficient knowledge of what to teach.

The general situation with respect to bedside nursing is equally unsatisfactory. Very little has been done to encourage nurses who excel in this branch of nursing to stay with it, and there has been a tendency to believe that progress for a staff nurse is synonymous with leaving the clinical field. It has not always been recognized that she is a stabilizing factor in any nursing service and, by force of her example, shares in the education of student nurses. If further preparation were afforded staff nurses, there might be better understanding and appreciation of the contribution which they alone can make to professional nursing.

It was with all these needs in mind that in 1943 the National League of Nursing Education appointed a special committee to study postgraduate courses in clinical nursing. The committee realized that many practical
problems, such as the meeting of costs, would eventually have to be solved, but as a first step it was decided to clarify the situation by formulating certain guiding principles and setting up criteria related to them. The main purpose of this report is to state these principles and criteria as briefly and clearly as possible.

Two distinct categories of clinical courses are here presented for consideration. The first category includes basic courses, usually conducted by hospitals or schools of nursing, offered to graduate nurses who either have had no preparation in a given clinical area during their professional undergraduate program or who wish to broaden their preparation by further study and experience. The second category includes advanced courses in clinical nursing, conducted by universities or colleges in conjunction with hospitals and other agencies, for the benefit of nurses who wish to become teachers, supervisors, head nurses, nursing consultants, or expert practitioners in a specific clinical area.

At this point brief reference must be made to existing postgraduate courses in clinical nursing. Very few advanced courses in clinical nursing are as yet offered by universities or colleges. Hospitals offer a variety of courses in order to augment their nursing staffs at a relatively low cost. Some of these courses afford organized instruction on a graduate level, but others lead only to a degree of achievement which the student could have attained at less cost by taking a position as a staff nurse in a hospital with good clinical facilities and a program of in-service education. The indiscriminate application of the term "postgraduate" to any and all courses taken subsequent to graduation is misleading; the term should be reserved for courses which are worthy of the name. There can be no doubt, however, that with the help of an advisory or standardizing agency the best of the existing courses might be developed on broader lines. The following outline of the form which such courses might take is based on the premise that a clinical course offered to a graduate nurse ought to make a significant contribution to her professional knowledge and skill.

Throughout the following discussion the term "undergraduate" refers exclusively to the basic professional course or curriculum taken prior to graduation from a school of nursing.
BASIC COURSES IN CLINICAL NURSING

DEFINITIONS

Basic clinical nursing courses are given exclusively for graduate nurses and offer planned fundamental instruction and initial experience in any chosen clinical area (such as psychiatry or tuberculosis) that was not included in their professional undergraduate curriculum. The scope and content are comparable to the undergraduate course in the corresponding area, but the methods of instruction are adjusted to the maturity and experience of the graduate nurse.

This basic course may be modified and supplemented for the benefit of the nurse who has taken a corresponding undergraduate course but who wishes to increase her knowledge and to gain proficiency. This supplementary course may be somewhat broader in scope than the basic course, but it is not an advanced course. It would be useful, however, to nurses whose preparation had been inadequate or who had not had recent experience in the field.

GENERAL PLAN FOR BASIC COURSES

Requirements for admission

Applicants must be graduate registered nurses, and selection should be made on the basis of evidence of professional capacity and of personal qualities which make for success.

Organization

The course should be so organized as to achieve its educational objectives effectively and in the shortest possible time. The relative emphasis on class instruction and clinical experience should be determined by the needs of the students in developing professional competence; one hour of organized instruction to six or seven hours of supervised practice is considered a reasonable ratio. The total time devoted to instruction, conference, and practice should not exceed forty-eight hours weekly and, preferably, should be limited to forty-four hours. Students should be admitted at specified intervals in groups sufficiently large to assure a satisfactory teaching-learning situation. A definite plan of rotation should provide for the necessary duration and essential variety of the clinical experience afforded each student.

Duration

The duration of the basic course for graduate nurses should not exceed that recommended for the undergraduate course in the corresponding area. In some instances it may be shortened in accordance with the needs and ability of the nurses as judged by appropriate tests.

Instruction and experience

Instruction and experience should be adjusted to the capacity and maturity of the graduate nurse. Methods of instruction should include
lectures, clinics, demonstrations, excursions, conferences, and supervised practice. Through directed study, observation, and practice consideration should be given to clinical nursing care and to the social and health aspects of the specific field.

**Clinical facilities**

Clinical facilities should afford adequate opportunities to observe a variety of clinical conditions and to care for a sufficient number of patients in order that the nurse may acquire the knowledge and skill which are necessary for proficiency. These facilities should be provided through the in-patient and out-patient departments of the hospital and through other allied agencies. Modern equipment and facilities required in scientific diagnosis, treatment, and nursing should also be available.

**Control and administration**

Any hospital which offers basic courses in clinical nursing should be approved by an accrediting or policy-making agency appropriate to the specific clinical area. If other agencies participate in giving the course, suitable contractual arrangements should be made with them. Each agency should be accredited or approved by the appropriate professional body.

The course should be controlled by the governing board of the institution which sponsors it, and the members of this board should be primarily concerned with its educational purposes. The immediate direction of the course should be delegated to a graduate nurse who has specialized in the given field.

**Finance**

The governing board of the institution should be responsible for providing the financial resources necessary for the conduct of the course on a sound educational basis. The budget should provide for the salaries of the teaching personnel and for all other expenses incurred during the course. Tuition fees should be determined in relation to the cash value of the service rendered to the institution by the student during the course. Payment of a tuition fee signifies that the student is entitled to receive sound instruction and carefully planned experience.

**Teaching personnel and equipment**

Suitably qualified nurses, physicians, dietitians, social workers, and other specialists in the clinical area should co-operate in conducting the course. Fully equipped classrooms and laboratories must be available, and adequate library facilities are equally indispensable.

**Records**

At the conclusion of the course students should be furnished with a complete and accurate record of their work both in theory and practice. Copies of these records should be kept on file for future reference.
ADVANCED COURSES IN CLINICAL NURSING

DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding to the formulation of basic assumptions and guiding principles, it is necessary to define certain terms which will be used in this discussion.

*Advanced course in clinical nursing:* This term refers to a broad and unified plan of instruction which has as its purpose the development of abilities essential for practice as a clinical nursing specialist. The course may be part of a program in advanced clinical nursing which includes, in addition to this specific clinical nursing course, various related courses which contribute to its content and enrich the background of the student.

*Clinical nursing specialist:* A clinical nursing specialist is a professional nurse who may be considered expert because she has attained broader knowledge, deeper insight and appreciations, and greater skill in a given clinical area than can be acquired in the professional undergraduate course. She is therefore better able to analyze, explore, and cope with nursing situations in that area.

*Nursing situation:* In a given clinical field a nursing situation exists whenever a patient requires nursing of any kind. Nursing includes all that can be done by the nurse to teach positive health, to prevent and to assist in curing disease, to relieve symptoms, to support the patient by physical and psychological means, and to help him to take as much responsibility as possible for his own welfare. Such nursing may be performed by the nurse either individually or in co-operation with the family and with community agencies. Every nursing situation involves the personality of the patient, his physical and mental condition, and the environmental factors which affect him.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

In formulating guiding principles it has been assumed that the following statements are true:

1. *There exists in the field of clinical nursing a body of advanced knowledge, appreciations, and skills beyond that which can be attained during the professional undergraduate course.*

   Lack of time, due to the recurring necessity for rotation to other clinical services, makes it impossible for the student nurse to acquire the degree of knowledge and skill required for specialization. Furthermore, new scientific discoveries continually bring about changes in nursing and medical practice.

2. *This body of advanced knowledge, appreciations, and skills can be acquired most effectively by means of an organized program of instruction and experience specially designed to develop the required abilities.*
While it is true that proficiency can be attained by "learning on the job," intensive study and organized experience lead more surely and rapidly to the development of a high degree of effectiveness in performance.

3. The fundamental purpose of the advanced course is the development of specialists in various fields of clinical nursing who will be capable of contributing to the continual improvement of nursing practice and education.

Nurses who are to be responsible for maintaining high standards of nursing service in a given clinical area must acquire advanced knowledge, appreciations, and skills in clinical nursing. A clear understanding of what constitutes good nursing is quite as important as a mastery of teaching and supervisory skills.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The purpose here is first to outline certain guiding principles for the organization and development of advanced courses in clinical nursing and then to list, under the heading of criteria, statements concerning the conditions and practices which should characterize these courses. These principles are based on those already established in the fields of general and professional education as well as on the judgment of many experienced nurses. They are applicable to some extent at any level of nursing education and should attain fulfillment in the advanced course. The suggested standards are relatively high, and it would be unreasonable to expect that any one course could at the outset measure up to all of them. Shortcomings in one respect might well be offset by excellence in others.

PRINCIPLE 1

Advanced courses in clinical nursing should be either a part of a major program in nursing established in an accredited university or college or should be approved for credit by that university or college.

There are many reasons why advanced courses in clinical nursing should be conducted by universities and colleges. These institutions afford the type of control and the facilities necessary to the attainment of educational objectives and can obtain the co-operation of various agencies in building up the total course. They can enrich the educational resources of the clinical field by providing instruction in professional subjects and in related aspects of the physical, biological, and social sciences. Nurses enjoy contact with students in other departments and benefit from cultural opportunities not otherwise available to them. Scientific bedside care—the very heart of nursing—is brought into focus within the university for analytical study, development, and refinement.

It is essential, however, that advanced courses in clinical nursing should be conducted only in universities or colleges already offering a major program of nursing leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree. Institutions
in which there is no nursing department or school lack the professional personnel who should assume the direction of the course and be responsible for its coherence and unity of purpose.

Criteria

1. The university or college in which the course is conducted is accredited by a regional educational accrediting body. The nursing division or department or school is approved or accredited by an appropriate professional accrediting or policy-making body.

2. The organization and administration of the course is in accord with the general policies of the university or college, and contractual arrangements are made with hospitals and other co-operating agencies.

3. The course is developed on a sound financial basis which assures stability, continuity, and satisfactory provision for education. Financial arrangements are made with co-operating agencies which enable them to offer an acceptable program of instruction and supervised experience.

4. Eligibility for matriculation in the university or college and in its nursing department or school is a pre-requisite for admission to the course. The course is credited on the same general lines as other courses offered by the university or college.

5. The administrative direction of the course is delegated to a nurse whose professional and educational qualifications meet the standards of the university or college as well as those of the co-operating agencies. Nurses who are members of the teaching and supervisory personnel have a schedule of hours comparable to that of the faculty of the college or university and in accord with the best present practice.

PRINCIPLE 2

An advanced course in clinical nursing should begin at a level of achievement equivalent to that attained upon the completion of a corresponding professional undergraduate course of approved standards. It should lead directly to the development of interests, abilities, and traits which are characteristic of a clinical nursing specialist.

A total scheme of nursing education should ensure gradual and more or less regular progression from one stage of learning to another more advanced. The undergraduate course in the corresponding area should have been varied and broad enough to serve as a satisfactory basis for the advanced course which proceeds to a new and higher level.

Criteria

1. Evidence is available that candidates for the advanced course already have achieved that degree of competence which is expected upon the completion of the corresponding approved undergraduate course.
2. Before entering upon the advanced course students are sufficiently experienced and mature to benefit from it.

3. The catalog and announcements related to the advanced course contain clear statements concerning its purpose, content, and requirements.

4. At the completion of the advanced course the student gives evidence of:
   (a) Greater insight and sensitivity in recognizing and interpreting significant factors in various nursing situations in the specific clinical field.
   (b) A clear concept of what constitutes an appropriate and comprehensive program of nursing in these situations and increased ability to become self-directive in making and carrying out related plans.
   (c) Skill in the performance of new and complex nursing procedures and added ability to adapt procedures to the needs of the individual patient.

**PRINCIPLE 3**

*The purpose of the advanced course in clinical nursing is to serve society as well as the nurse herself. The learning experience which it offers should, therefore, be based on her needs not only as an individual but also as a professional nurse with a specialized function to perform in a specific field of nursing practice.*

In this student group, as in any other, there will be differences in purpose, ability, background, experience, and personal interests. While these differences should be taken into account, the social purpose of the course must also be kept in mind. All students must attain the standards of knowledge and performance which society has the right to expect of professional nurses who have completed advanced courses in a chosen clinical area.

**Criteria**

1. The institution sponsoring the course studies the needs of society for the specific type of nursing service and relates them to plans for the professional preparation of nurses who are to render that service.

2. The university or college determines the type of student capable of profiting by any specific advanced course and admits no others.

3. The student is made aware of the requirements in her chosen field and is guided toward a fuller understanding of the pattern of her own abilities in relation to it.

4. The members of the teaching staff know the qualifications of each student and utilize this knowledge in guidance. There is evidence of co-operation and interest in finding out what the students are like, what
they want, and what they need. Appropriate differentiations are made in theoretical work and clinical experience.

**PRINCIPLE 4**

The creation of a satisfactory teaching-learning situation largely depends upon careful selection of methods of instruction, study activities, and types of clinical experience appropriate to the level of advanced study.

It has already been pointed out that relatively few advanced courses in clinical nursing have as yet been established. In the meantime the faculty should be free to experiment with any educational methods which seem likely to prove effective and to determine further selection in accordance with an evaluation of the results. As in any graduate study, there should be gradual transition to more mature and independent habits of work, and the student should become familiar with authoritative sources of new learning.

**Criteria**

1. Students experience, under guidance, responsibilities comparable to those which they will be expected to assume as clinical nursing specialists. Selected nursing situations involve the use of more extensive knowledge, greater understanding, and a higher degree of skill than has been attained during the corresponding undergraduate course.

2. Experience in the clinical field is directed by nursing specialists in that area who have had preparation for teaching and supervision and are reasonably well informed in related fields.

3. More opportunity for individualized instruction is afforded than is usually possible during the undergraduate course. Emphasis is placed upon developing capacity both for independent study and for participation in group discussion.

4. Study activities include critical interpretation of experience in the clinical field, case conferences, study of case histories, extensive reading, and so forth.

**PRINCIPLE 5**

An essential requirement in any advanced course in clinical nursing is that superior clinical facilities shall be available. Its educational objectives can be attained only when there are sufficient patients for the student to observe and to nurse.

The clinical services should be segregated, and there should be a sufficient number and variety of patients to afford the experience required for specialization. It should also be possible for the student to participate in group activities related to the total nursing care of the patient.
Criteria

1. Segregated clinical facilities (including out-patient and social service departments) are available within the institutions associated with the course. Other essential experiences are provided by means of close working relationships with public health and other social agencies.

2. Hospitals and other agencies participating in the course are approved by appropriate accrediting or policy-making authorities.

3. Conditions in the clinical field, including the rapport between the students and the nursing and medical staffs, help to create a favorable teaching-learning situation.

4. The relationship between clinical experience and learning needs is consistently made clear to the students.

5. Hours of nursing practice required for credit are so arranged as to foster the development of the desired abilities.

6. If nursing service beyond that required for credit is given by the student, the schedule is determined in advance and is so arranged as to safeguard health and educational needs.

PRINCIPLE 6

The advanced course in clinical nursing should afford opportunities for critical analysis of practical problems and should lead to the development of sound methods of evaluation and experimentation.

There is great need for nurses capable of functioning creatively in nursing and of analyzing and improving nursing practice. Students who possess the necessary background and ability should be permitted to pursue some investigative study in their chosen field under competent direction. Such study should be related to the total care of the patient as well as to nursing procedures.

Criteria

1. The members of the teaching and supervisory staffs foster a scientific approach on the part of the student and make it possible for her to gain insight into the methods used in the evaluation and revision of nursing practice.

2. Opportunities are provided for the comparison of different points of view and for the observation of methods and procedures used in similar clinical services elsewhere.

3. Students are encouraged to evaluate the advanced course in clinical nursing while it is in progress and to make suggestions for improvement.
The advanced clinical course should be presented in a setting and atmosphere which favor the development of personal, social, and professional qualities which are essential in leadership.

A clinical nursing specialist should be a leader in her field, and throughout the advanced course there should be interest in fostering the development of required characteristics. The qualities of leadership are not developed by formal instruction alone but are built up by cumulative experience under appropriate conditions.

 Criteria

1. The faculty demonstrate democratic and efficient leadership.
2. The students are encouraged to participate in nursing situations which call for the exercise of the qualities and skills of leadership.
3. The faculty considers the students to be adult professional persons capable of independent thinking and action.
4. Students are permitted to experience the challenge of constructive criticism and the realization of successful accomplishment.
5. Provision is made for suitable living and working conditions and for health service.
6. Adequate guidance is offered, and the faculty are alert to any physical, emotional, or social problems that may interfere with progress.

PRINCIPLE 8

The duration of the advanced course in clinical nursing should be so planned that, while acceptable from an educational point of view, it can be undertaken at a reasonable cost in terms of both time and money. Its length should be determined in direct relation to that of the total curriculum leading to a baccalaureate degree.

Until such time as results attained in advanced clinical courses can be evaluated, it is difficult to set even maximum and minimum time limits. Undoubtedly there will be variations in the duration of courses in different clinical fields. For example, it is reasonable to assume that the time required for an advanced clinical course in psychiatric nursing would be longer than for one in surgical nursing. In any case, however, the course should be so adapted that its duration represents an acceptable balance of time and financial expenditure in relation to that of the total degree program.

 Criteria

1. The time required for the completion of the course is so adjusted that it is satisfactory from both an educational and economic point of view.
2. Students who are unusually well prepared are permitted to complete the course in less time than students who for any reason require additional study or experience.

**PRINCIPLE 9**

*Academic credit should be granted only on the basis of actual attainment of the stated objectives of the advanced course in clinical nursing.*

Achievement tests may be used in determining attainment in relation to specific educational objectives. It is, however, equally important to evaluate the degree of effectiveness displayed by the student in actual nursing situations.

**Criteria**

1. The institution conducting the course uses the best available procedures in appraising the extent to which the student has acquired the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills.

2. Students are required to maintain acceptable standards of achievement throughout the course. Those who find it impossible to do so are advised to withdraw.