

## **RECAPTURING THE MEDICAL MISSIONARY SPIRIT: AN ADVOCACY FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST NURSES AS TOOLS FOR EVANGELISM IN GHANA**

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### **Abstract**

Medical missionary is a unique way of spreading the Seventh-day Adventist message across the world by health workers. The Seventh-day Adventist Church knowing the importance of medical missionary work and the role nurses can play in this mission, has established schools of nursing to pursue the evangelistic agenda. However, it has been observed that the medical missionary spirit of the pioneers keeps dwindling in the church as the years go by. This article synthesises how the medical missionary spirit can be recaptured among Ghanaian nurses working in the Seventh-day Adventist health care institutions. Perspectives on nursing in providing spiritual care, the need for gospel workers by the church and the need to train nurses as medical missionaries have been well discussed. Recommendations on how to recapture the medical missionary spirit among Seventh-day Adventist nurses in Ghana have been provided.

**Key words:** Medical missionary, Adventist Nurses, Nursing, Ghana, Seventh-day Adventist Church

### **1. Introduction and Background Information**

Meeting the spiritual needs of patients by nurses is very important to the achievement of quality care and immediate recovery. This is because nursing care, by its very nature, is spiritual (Yang and Mao, 2007). Not only is nursing care spiritual in nature, but nurses have a better understanding of their own spirituality which helps in providing quality patient care (Koren, Czurylo, Epsom, Gattuso, Stark, Zastrow and Basu, 2009). Thus, most nurses know that spiritual care is an essential component of holistic care (Berman and Snyder, 2014 and Thornton, 2012). However, many will acknowledge that it is rarely given the same priority as other dimensions of care (Reig, Mason & Preston, 2006 and Baldacchino, 2015). Nurses by virtue of their training and work, come into contact with people from all walks of life young or old, rich or poor, educated and uneducated with



different needs such as spiritual, suffering and dejection. Patients in the contexts of suffering, disability, terminal illnesses, and dying are often struggling with the meaning of life and death (Puchalski, 2002). This is where the Adventist Nurse comes in as a medical missionary to present Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith to such patients. The spiritual care provided during this time goes a long way to aid fast recovery.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, a Christian denomination which observes the seventh-day Sabbath, knowing the importance of medical missionary work and the role nurses can play in this mission, has established schools of nursing to pursue the evangelistic agenda. It is important that "those in our institutions are to give evidence that they understand their part in the genuine gospel medical missionary work" (White, Letter, 102, 1900). Thus, the various individuals who have dedicated themselves to teach in the Seventh - day Adventist health institutions should appreciate the fact that they are training people to spread the gospel through medical work in the needed communities. Over the years the agenda of using nurses as evangelists appears to be dying down or neglected by the church. Meanwhile, the church keeps producing large number of nurses in the various nurses' training institutions throughout the world who are better prepared for the evangelistic work which promotes church growth. In addition, the church has numerous health care facilities that are filled with nurses who are to continue the compassionate care of Christ. It has been written that in every "place where the sick could be brought to Him, was to be found His hospital" (White, Ministry of Healing, pp. 17, 18.).

Medical missionary work is the most effective mechanism by which the ground is prepared for the sowing of the seeds of truth, and the instrument also by which the harvest is reaped (White, Review and Herald, 1908). In effect, medical missionary work is the helping hand of the gospel ministry. There must be no separation between the genuine medical missionary work and the gospel ministry. Seventh-day Adventist nurses on medical missionary work is consistent with the professional expectations for spiritual care which have been established in the Code of Ethics of nurses (American Nurses Association, 2001). This indicates that "the Lord has ordained that Christian physicians and nurses shall labour in connection with those who preach the word" (White). She added that "Angels of God will make the impression, and under the hallowed influence of the Holy Spirit, hearts will be touched". Nurses therefore use systematic approach to meet the spiritual needs of the clients that are put under their care.

If a nurse is able to meet this spiritual need, the patient builds confidence and trust in him/ her. By this, the Adventist Nurse can take the opportunity to evangelize patients while meeting their spiritual needs. Eve-



ry medical missionary has a remedy for the sin-sick soul as well as for the diseased body. This means that as nurses meet the physical sicknesses of patients placed under their care, the spiritual needs will also be met. It has been recognized that there is no work that is so successful in winning souls especially in new fields as medical missionary (White, Medical Ministry, 239). By "faith in Christ, he is to act as an evangelist a messenger of mercy" (White, Medical Ministry, 39.2). In other words, the medical practitioner is to work as an individual preaching the gospel to the world through medical care. Thus, in practice spiritual needs should be given equal and sometimes greater precedence than physical needs (Sartori, 2010). Nurses need to consider psychological, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual aspects of care to help patients understand the meaning of their experience. The purpose of this article is to recapture the medical missionary spirit among SDA nurses and advocate for them to be used as tools for evangelism in Ghana. Among other things, the article provides perspectives on nursing profession, the role of nurses in meeting the spiritual needs of patients, spirit of prophecy considerations of the medical missionary work, and recommendations on how to make the Seventh-day Adventist Nurses effective in evangelistic work.

## 2. Perspectives on Nursing

Henderson indicated that "the unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will, or, and to do this in such a way as to help him gain independence as rapidly as possible" (Henderson, 1966 as cited by Berman, & Snyder, 2014). American Nurses Association (ANA) described nursing practice as "direct, goal oriented and adaptable to the needs of the individual, the family, and community during health and illness". Thus nursing is a science that deals with human needs and related health problems. These needs are physical, intellectual, psychological and spiritual. Spirituality may include religion and reflect one's values and beliefs. Nurses' help people satisfy their unmet needs and solve problems in their lives. This is because all people have certain fundamental needs that they strive to satisfy. Nurses care for individuals of all ages and cultural backgrounds who are healthy or ill in a holistic manner based on the individual's physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, social, and spiritual needs.

The profession combines physical science, social science, nursing theory, and technology in caring for those individuals (Berman and Snyder, 2014). Nurses may follow their personal and professional interests by working with any group of people, in any setting, at any time. This means



that if well equipped, Adventist nurses can be evangelists and win souls for Christ due to their professional preparation. They can do this in both Adventist and non Adventist health care facilities. This will not be out of place since historically; nurses were mostly from Christian community and performed various duties reflecting the teachings of Christ (DeWit, 2009). During the early years of the Christian Church, St. Paul sent a deaconess Phoebe to Rome as the first visiting nurse. She took care of both women and men. This means that, "Before the foundation of modern nursing, nuns often provided nursing-like services (Nightingale, 1820–1910)."

Thus, the Christian churches have been long term patrons of nursing and influential in the development of the ethos of modern nursing. From its earliest days, and following the edicts of Jesus, Christianity had encouraged its devotees to tend the sick and that Priests were often also physicians ((DeWit). This therefore goes to affirm the fact that if Adventist nurses evangelize to their patients by sharing the second coming of Christ with them, they will be performing the old mandate of the profession as pioneered by its leaders. The religious influences of the nursing profession is well recognized in the history of nursing because workers who were involved in nursing were often trained in the doctrines of the church including unquestioning obedience, humility, and sacrificing one's self for the good of others (Kelly, 2008). In fact, an individual nurse did not make independent decisions but followed instructions given by a priest. Florence Nightingale been the mentor and mother of nursing indicated her desire to pray frequently and visit the people and take care of the sick individuals (Dossey, 2010).

The religious influence is very important for the total well being of the patient because in the health sector, the spiritual needs are often ignored, forgotten, and never dealt with. If done, there is often insufficient nursing time or privacy to allow the patient to discuss their spiritual beliefs (Kelly, 2008). A patient who sees a nurse meet this need become attached and connected. Meanwhile, championing spirituality for all patients forms part of the holistic nursing care. Sharing the Adventist message of hope with patients and significant others will make a difference. Through the healing hands of the Adventist nurse, different groups of people will come to appreciate the good works of God. Since health is a universal requirement, everybody in his/her life time will need it. The nurse can therefore be an evangelist to the client and their families (Kelly).

### **3. Advantages of Nurses as Medical Missionary Workers**

Nurses have greater advantages as medical missionary workers due to the various roles they assume when providing care to clients in different set-



tings (Berman & Snyder, 2014). According to White (CME, 1912, p18) "the Lord wants wise men and women acting in the capacity of nurses, to comfort and help the sick and suffering as these men and women use conscientiously the knowledge they gain, they will increase in capacity and become successful missionaries pointing souls to the Lamb of God". Some of these roles of the nurse are: caregiver, communicator, teacher, client advocate, counselor and so on (Berman and Snyder). These roles are essential for evangelism since "skills of listening, observing, and presence are inherent in nursing and support spiritual care" (Reig et al, 2006). In the health sector, nurses are the largest health care providers and as such are seen as the hub of the health care team. Using their numbers, nurses can meet different needs of clients. There is the need for consecrated nurses to carry out the evangelistic work of the church (White, 1946).

The caregiver role has traditionally included those activities that assist the client physically and psychologically while preserving the client's dignity. The care giving encompasses the physical, psychosocial, developmental, cultural, and spiritual levels. Concerning the communication role, Kozier et al, 2008 states that, communication is an integral part of all nursing roles. Nurses communicate with the client, support persons, other health professionals, and the people in the community. In the role of *communicator*, nurses identify client problems and then communicate these verbally, or in writing to other members of the health team. As a teacher, the nurse helps clients learn about their health and the health care procedure they need to perform to restore or maintain their health. The nurse assesses the client's learning needs and readiness to learn, set specific learning goals in conjunction with the client, enact teaching strategies, and measures learning.

According to Kozier et al, (2008) and Berman and Snyder (2014), the nurse as a client advocate acts to protect the client. In this role the nurse may represent the client's needs and wishes to other health professional, such as relaying the client's wishes for information to the physician. Counseling is the process of helping a client to recognize and cope with stressful psychologic or social problems, to develop improved interpersonal relationships and to promote personal growth. It involves providing emotional, intellectual, and psychologic support. The nurse counsel's primarily healthy individuals with normal adjustment difficulties and focuses on helping persons develop new attitudes, feelings, and behaviours by encouraging the client to look at alternative behaviours, recognize the choices, and develop a sense of control. Performing these roles, the nurse is in a better position to reach out to the unbelievers who happens to be under her care.

In order words, the nurse evangelist has a greater advantage of winning souls for Christ due to the various roles she plays in the health care



environment. In care giving, communicating, teaching, advocating and counseling, she can seize the opportunity to present Christ in a mission and non-mission health care environment. By asking patients if prayer plays a role in their lives, if comfortable, she can offer a prayer which can be a starting point. This opens a dialogue with the patient regarding the purpose and meaning of life. Looking at the roles she performs, she always has audience for the word of God. What is required is for her to be well equipped with the techniques of evangelism and soul winning because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. That is why Adventist nurses need to be reminded of their medical missionary role and revisit its precepts for the growth of the church.

#### **4. The Need for Gospel Workers by the Adventist Church**

The great inspirational writer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has articulated that, "Time is short, Workers for Christ are needed everywhere. There should be one hundred earnest faithful laborers in homes and foreign mission fields. (White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 1903, 488). She added, "God calls for consecrated workers who will be true to him –humble men who will see the need of evangelistic work and do not draw back but do everyday's work faithfully, relying upon God for help and strength in every emergency (Ez. 22.3). The message is to be taken up by those who love and fear God. Lay not your burden upon any conference. Go forth, and as evangelists, in a humble way present a "Thus saith the Scriptures"-Letter 43, 1905. 24.3 Evangelism. By this, she emphasized that "Every medical practitioner whether he acknowledges it or not, is responsible for the soul's as well as the bodies of his patients" (White, MM 31.1). The fact is that the second coming of Christ is very near so the gospel message needs to be spread fast.

She further added that, "Every physician should be a devoted, intelligent gospel medical missionary, familiar with Heaven's remedy for sin-sick soul as well as with the science of healing bodily disease. (White, MM 31.1). Furthermore, "He who acts as a guardian of the health of the body should have tact to work for the salvation of the soul, the Redeemer expects our physicians to make the saving of souls their first work" (White, MM37.2). Therefore, "There is great work to be done. Take hold of it intelligently. God will help everyone who does this" (MM 38. 2). Again, the Adventist nurse is been reminded to have an evangelistic spirit "Let them remember that if they do not work for the healing of the soul as well as for the healing of the body, they are not following the example of the great Medical Missionary." Therefore, sharing the Adventist health message with those who have not heard is a mandate of Adventist nurses in mission and non-mission health care institutions.



## 5. Why Training Nurses in Evangelism?

Seventh-day Adventist nurses need to be given the necessary knowledge and skills in evangelism so as to be able to witness for God in their daily practice. This is carefully written by the inspirational writer that we should "Let medical missionary study the word of God diligently, that they may be familiar with its promises and may be able in tenderness and love, to point sinners to the Great Healer". The purpose of Adventist health facilities have been well articulated that "It was to bring spiritual as well as physical healing to the sick that our sanitariums were established" (White, MM 40.1). She explained that when nurses respond to His invitation, they will know that they receive the things they ask for. Their minds will be enlightened by wisdom from above" (MM 40.5). In addition, she indicated that "the Christian physician has a high calling. With his fuller knowledge of the human system and its laws, he is in a position to preach the gospel of salvation with much efficiency and power" (CME, 43.3). It is therefore important that nurses receive the necessary education in evangelism in order to do the work better. This she said, "The education of students in medical missionary lines is not complete unless they are trained to work in connection with the church and the ministry" (Counsel on Health, 557). It can also be stated that "Our workers are to become intelligent in regard to Christ's life and manner of working". The Lord will help those who desire to cooperate with Him as physicians, if they will become learners of Him and how to care for the suffering. He will exercise His power through them for the healing of the sick." (White, LLM, 6.7). In all, it is imperative that nurses receive necessary educational training on how to win souls for Christ so that their approach will be effective.

Lack of knowledge regarding the specific beliefs of a patient's religion and how to facilitate those spiritual needs are other potential barriers to quality nursing care (Kelly, 2008). A significant barrier that nurses identify is discomfort due to a perceived lack of competence to provide spiritual care (p. 2005). The idea of training nurses has been expounded by inspirational writer that "After carefully considering the light that has been sent to us, it must be the Lord's plan that a medical missionary school should be carried forward here, with a course sufficiently complete to thoroughly qualify nurses for their professional duties, and to work as educators in medical evangelistic work" (LLM 6.7). That's health education and health evangelism are the vanguard of community acceptance and effective soul winning (Waddell, 1973). Therefore, "Let Seventh-day Adventist medical workers remember that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Christ was the greatest Physician that ever trod this sin-cursed earth. The Lord would have His people come to Him for their power of healing. He will baptize



them with His Holy Spirit, and fit them for a service that will make them a blessing in restoring the spiritual and physical health of those who need healing" (White, LLM , 6.7). And the fact that "soon there will be no work done in ministerial lines but medical-missionary work" makes it imperatively mandatory upon every worker in the Seventh-day Adventist institutions especially nurses to prepare themselves as quickly and as thoroughly as possible for efficient service in this most important work.

## **6. Why the Ghanaian Context?**

In Ghana, the Seventh-day Adventist church has ten (10) hospitals and thirteen (13) clinics that employ both Adventist and non-Adventist nurses. These facilities are scattered throughout the country, and can be found in cities as well as villages for the provision of health services. These health facilities enjoy greater patronage from the general public and serve Adventist and non-Adventist alike. In some places of the country, the Adventist health services are the only source of health care for the inhabitants. For instance in some clinics, it is the nurses who are in charge of health care provision without the presence of a medical doctor or medical assistants. This means that, there are already prepared grounds for the evangelistic work of the Seventh-day Adventist nurse. If given the necessary preparation and perspective, they will have no barriers for evangelism since the hospitals and the clinics are established for that purpose. In every place the sick may be found, and those who go forth as workers for Christ should be true health reformers, prepared to give those who are sick the simple treatments that will relieve them, and then pray with them (White, Medical Ministry," p. 320).

In addition, there is a chaplaincy department in the facilities to facilitate the mission of evangelism. Even the Adventist nurses who are in the non-Adventist institutions have equal opportunities to reach out to their patients who do not hold the Adventist faith through the various roles they perform for their patients. Also, there are two diploma health training institutions as well as a university for the education of professional nurses within a Christian environment dedicated to the provision of high quality holistic care to individuals, families, groups and communities. Thus, preparing Christian nurses for service to God and humanity and emphasizing the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. The goal of these training institutions is to prepare competent nurses who are committed to compassionate Christian service.

An important and effective tool for the Ghanaian context is the strong body of association that serves as an umbrella for all Adventist health



workers including nurses called, Adventist Health Association (AHA). This association brings all nurses and other health care providers working in Adventist and non-Adventist institutions together. Members have regular meetings which are once in a month and discuss issues affecting Adventist health sector and the country at large. The meetings are regional base with active participation of all health care providers including the chaplains in the health facilities. This can serve as avenue for emphasizing the evangelistic role the nurse needs to perform in the care of the patient entrusted to her. It is therefore important to recognize that "true medical missionary work is of heavenly origin. It was not originated by any person who lives." (White, Medical Ministry, p. 24). Christ, the great Medical Missionary, has left us an example for us to follow in His steps and minister in His name (Thrash, n.d.). Medical missionary cannot be satisfied with ministering only to the body. In fact, His primary burden, never forgotten, is for the eternal salvation of those for whom He labors. Therefore "we should ever remember that the object of the medical missionary work is to point sin-sick men and women to the Man of Calvary, who taketh away the sin of the world" (White, Ministry of Healing 144).

## **7. Recommendations**

Considering the contributions that the Ghanaian Adventist nurse can make in the area of evangelism if given the necessary background training, I would like to recommend the following;

1. The Adventist Health Association be given due recognition by the Personal Ministries Department of the church so that they can involve them in their activities.
2. The Health Ministries Department liaises with the School of Theology and Missions of Valley View University to organize workshops/Seminars on evangelism for Adventist nurses and to remind them of the mandate given them.
3. The Nurses' Training Institutions of the church should include in their curriculum a subject on evangelism that can prepare these nurses from the school level before they enter into the job market for practice.
4. The Health Ministries Department in conjunction with the Ghana Adventist Health Services and the Personal Ministries Department should organize orientation programs for newly employed nurses into Adventist health institutions.
5. The Church should come out with simple to read Adventist health books and tracks in the hospitals and clinics to be distributed to patients by nurses as they care for them.



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