

Hospital Administrators Are Faced With Realistic Problem

(Editor's note: This is another in the series of articles in which financial problems and some of the main services provided by hospitals is discussed. The series was prepared in cooperation with local hospital administrators.)

"How can we continue to raise our standards and keep pace with present medical advances without a corresponding increase in income?"

This is the question faced by hospital administrators, according to Sister Luke of the Savior, who is Sacred Heart hospital administrator.

"We are being unrealistic when we think medical care or hospital services will become less complex instead of more complex as medical progress continues," she said.

The constant demands of medical staffs for greater outlays by hospitals for capital construction, new equipment and more trained personnel to keep pace with medical progress are a familiar story in virtually all hospitals, regardless of size or location, surveys indicate.

Behind Medicine
The administrator of one of the leading hospitals in a metropolitan area recently commented that he believed his hospital to be farther behind medicine today than it was 10 years ago. In other words, the gap between what the hospital is doing and what

it should be doing to enable the public to take advantage of scientific developments is growing wider instead of narrower.

Possibly the biggest problem is in personnel. How, with the nation-wide acute shortage of qualified hospital personnel, and with the payroll figure reaching ever higher, are hospitals to meet the challenge?

In this locality, payroll takes nearly 70 per cent of the income, hospital officials reported. Most hospitals try to hold this part of the hospital income to 65 per cent, but few succeed.

Balancing personnel against patients' census is not as simple as it might appear at first sight. In all fairness to employees, a hospital should, as far as possible, insure steady employment practices, even at the expense of financial loss to the hospital. Hence, while the number of patients may vary, expenses, and particularly the payroll, continue undisturbed.

Judicious Allocation
"A judicious allocation of work for our personnel, together with prudent maintenance of same, is a must," Sister Luke noted. "For, while the objective of the hospital is first and foremost to render the best feasible patient care, its second objective is to do this in the most efficient and economical manner possible. Pressures against higher hos-

pital costs by a public unacquainted with the problems faced by administrators, are threatening to move the secondary objective into first place. This would result in deterioration of the best hospital system in the world."

Hospitals are constantly attacked from all sides to hold down costs. Insurance companies, labor unions, self-appointed spokesmen for the public, all imply that hospitals could clamp a lid on costs if they so desired. The fact that costs have continued to rise in the face of this pressure is a tribute to hospital administrators and governing authorities. They continue to put the patient's welfare and the hospital's responsibility to the doctor, patient, employee and public, ahead of the dollar sign, Sister Luke noted.

Majority Married
Difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of nurses is one of the main brown-wrinklers among hospital employment problems. Although Sacred Heart and the other area hospitals are paying better than average basic salaries to their nurses, it is difficult to attract them to the Rogue valley, especially so far from metropolitan areas.

"The large majority of our nurses are married. Naturally, their first responsibility is to their family, a principle we respect and would not wish to



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alter in any way," Sister Luke said. However, this presents a definite problem. A married nurse must accommodate her working hours to the best interests of her family. This applies to days, hours and shifts. She must see that working outside the home does not conflict with the household program, she said.

"A nurse may be positively opposed to working in a designated department, the operating rooms, let us say, where the need may be urgent, but she may have neither inclination nor technical ability for that type of work," Sister Luke continued. "Others may choose to work on specific days, perhaps two or three days a week and no more. Some may not consider week end work. The same may be said of any other employee. Although we sincerely appreciate that help is given hospitals in their personnel crisis, the shortage of well-trained hospital personnel continues to be a real problem."

School for Training
Why not conduct a school for training nurses to insure a liberal supply? some have asked. Sacred Heart hospital has conducted such a school and many graduated from it. Some of these nurses still render services to this area.

Sacred Heart school, like five other smaller schools conducted in conjunction with hospitals of the Sisters of Providence, had to close because of its inability to meet the increasing requirements for schools of nursing.

Another staffing problem, although not critical now, is that of orderlies and male nurses. Attempts are being made to induce young men graduating from several of the all male schools of nursing in the east, to move west where employment is plentiful and where living conditions are attractive. Such male nurses would be offered such opportunities as administrative positions in west coast hospitals.

Hospital administration is an exacting art and a science. It comprises not only medical services, but a medley of know-how in hotel operations from housekeeping to engineering.

A number of universities have already added hospital administration courses to their curriculum, so greater basic knowledge and science will prevail in the hospital management of tomorrow.

Hospitals are alert to find a means to meet the challenge of how to operate most effectively and economically, while keeping pace with advances in the medical field, and safeguarding the best interests of the public it serves.

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TALK ISN'T CHEAP
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BOSTON FIRE RECORDS
Boston — (UPI) — City records show that during 1836 a total of 208 fire alarms were sounded in Boston. Seventy were false alarms and 44 fires were of incendiary origin.

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