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Reversing Hierarchies in Healthcare

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Nurses have always been at the sharp end of care. Despite being a prominent symbol of healthcare since the history of medical sciences, nursing profession certainly hasn't received its due. It is true; you don't run to a nurse when you have a fever. But nurses are no less than angels of care for the millions of ailing patients, who are fighting pain and recovering from injuries. We all love that nurse who always takes injections without hurting us, don't we? Yet, why is it that nursing profession is at the fag end in the hierarchy of care?

For multiple reasons nurses do not take centre stage in the care cycle. But don't we all point fingers at the nurses when care falls short of standards in hospitals? Several factors including workforce scarcity, medical equipment or the complexity of the medical condition itself at the time of admission of a patient could play a role in determining the quality of care. However, nurses are often the first to be blamed in such situations due to the inferior position we have assigned to them in the overall system of healthcare.

In order to administer better care practices, higher-quality and safer care, it is important for the healthcare systems to rely on evidence-based practice and offer favorable working conditions for nurses. A major part of the patient care is completely centered on the work of nurses. This is especially pertinent in the context of rehabilitation and recovery care. We are not discussing about the situation where physicians are replaced by nursing practitioners. But instead with adequate empowerment and up skilling, how nurses can effectively drive the overall care plan in patients. While doctors can offer continuous monitoring and intervene in the need of any emergency, the major part of any recovery journey is in helping a patient adapt to an altered lifestyle. This can be attained only with the assistance of skilled nurses.

Nurses spend more time with the patients and therefore will be the first to look for any vital signs during the recuperation phase. Since nurses are always in the middle of action in any given medical sphere, their wealth of insights offer a unique perspective to design and implement the treatment procedure best suited for a patient. In future too, with the rapid realization of digitization and robotics in administering care, nurses will continue to play a very important role. Being the companions in revival to patients by sharing more face-time with them, nurses will be able to easily smooth out any technological disruptions caused by these innovations.

The roles and responsibilities of nurses have evolved in time. But unchanged and constant have been their compassion and dedication to those in need of help, as the unsung caregivers of our healthcare system. It is time to relook at the hierarchies and place nurses in critical positions. They should be given the chance to work with interdisciplinary teams, made to collect and analyze valuable patient-centric data, thereby driving evidence-based practice. High-value organizations which don't make a compromise on the quality of care and safety of patients, will re-work on their internal hierarchies to bring nurses on the front line of care, in every way.

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