

Notes on Nursing Study Guide

Notes on Nursing by Florence Nightingale

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Notes on Nursing Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Characters.....	4
Objects/Places.....	7
Themes.....	9
Style.....	11
Quotes.....	13
Topics for Discussion.....	15



Plot Summary

First published in 1860, "Notes on Nursing" is a guide on how to think like a nurse. The definition of nurse was much different than what it is today. Florence Nightingale's statistics show that there were two kinds of nurses. Domestic servants, who also took care of someone in the home and professional nurses, who worked in hospitals. Her statistics show that more than half of the nurses acting also as domestic servants ranged in age from five to twenty years old. One can imagine that a five-year-old could use any instruction available. Most of her instructions may seem common sense today, but were revolutionary then. The challenge to provide nursing service as she recommends remains as relevant today as it was then.

Miss Nightingale starts with the fact that at one point in everyone's life they will be in charge of taking care of a sick person. She states that her intent with this book is to offer hints to help a person become an effective caregiver. She makes a point of stating that this book is not an instruction book on how to be a nurse. She encourages the readers to figure this out on their own. She also makes a point of stating that she offers no professional medical advice, stating clearly that this is the job of the doctors.

The first part of the book starts with a theory that disease and sickness is a "reparative" process. They are the body telling the mind that it needs something it is not getting. These could be fresh air, warmth, quiet or a clean environment. It is in providing these that the role of the nurse comes into play. Historically, it was believed that any woman had the skills to be a nurse. Miss Nightingale argues that the skill of an effective nurse have never been defined, much less inherited or taught.

At the time Florence Nightingale was a nurse, there were arguments against nursing. Nursing was thought to be an act of prolonging the inevitable, that it went against nature and the will of God. Florence Nightingale argues this point on two fronts. First, if man-made environmental factors are causing the person to stay ill, then there is no sin in taking man-made means to correct the environmental factors. The second point is this: In terminal cases where it is just a matter of time till the patient expires, nursing that patient is not futile. The reason is because it is important in the medical profession to segregate the illness from the environmental factors. This serves the purpose of observing the illness in an isolated environment so that it may be more clearly understood so that a remedy may be devised.

To those women who think they are not nurse material, Miss Nightingale tasks them with the death rate of newborns due to poor household hygiene and asks what mother would not do all she could to ensure the health of her baby.



Characters

Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale is a nurse who wrote this book, and it is in the first person. The practice of modern-day nursing is based on the teachings of Florence Nightingale. Her writings and teachings stressed that management of duties is very important. Her tenets became the basics of patient care we use today. She lived from 1820 to 1910. She was known to take many notes during her work day, and she used those notes to write this book. Details are very important to Florence Nightingale, both in her note taking and delivery of care to patients. From her writing still, the reader can tell she has great pride in her concern and level of care for patients and believed all nurses should be just as capable of providing the same level of care.

As an author, she is highly respected and her work was praised by many in the health professionals. The public health profession honor society called Delta Omega is a proud supporter of her writing and the reprint of her book. As a nurse and patient advocate, she is also highly respected and accomplished. Her greatest dream and achievement is the Nightingale Training School of Nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. The school was founded six months after this book was first published. In current times with so many schools and colleges of nursing, it is hard to imagine one woman working so hard to successfully get one of the first colleges started.

Florence Nightingale has specific areas related to nursing and patient care that caused concern. The most prominent in her writing is a clean patient environment. The highlights of this work include ventilation and warming, where she discusses the importance of clean circulating air to the patient. Ideas on the positioning of the patient for exposure to clean air, the difference between clean air and cold air as it affects the patient and the importance to the patient of not breathing re-circulated air are discussed from firsthand experience. Next she discusses the health of houses, such as those that have dung heaps stacked against the house should remove such contamination or having all drain and sewer pipes trapped and venting outside. Next she discusses petty management, which deals with how to manage the patients environment and affairs so that the patient experiences the least negative impact and are allowed to get well.

Next she discusses noise and the importance of quiet on a patient's health, then she discusses the importance of variety being introduced into the patient's environment to stave off depression. She mentions flowers or a view out the window as examples. Next she discusses food and the restorative properties of some food and the negative effects of others. Next she discusses bedding and the importance of the right bed and how the sheets should be changed frequently and why. Next she discusses the importance of proper light in the infirmary and how proper sunlight helps restore the patient's health.

Next she discusses the cleanliness of rooms and walls and how to clean a room and the importance of it. Next she discusses personal cleanliness, which dealt with the



importance of bathing the patient and how nothing else helps them feel better and the negative effects of not bathing. Next she discusses the negative effects of the chattering hopes and advices of well-meaning visitors, who undermine the work of the doctor and sometimes make the patient feel worse. Finally, she discusses the observation of the sick, where she stresses the importance of keen observation on the patient and how this quality could mean the difference between life and death for the patient.

It is amazing that Florence Nightingale is the author of a book that is as applicable today as when it was written over one hundred years ago. Florence Nightingale is a wonderful example and role model, not only for nurses but for anyone in a profession that cares for people. She did what she did out of respect and concern for others. A character trait many could adopt.

The patient

Throughout Florence Nightingale's book, she refers to the patient. There is not a specific name, gender or age. She had equal concerns for the old and young, especially babies. During the time period Florence wrote her book and did her great work, the patient could have any number of symptoms, which could lead to any number of ailments. The patient referred to in the book did not have specific ailments, more than likely they were stricken with the common ailments of the time such as measles, small-pox, scarlet-fever and diphtheria.

The patient could be found recovering from their illnesses either in hospitals or private homes. The book describes how patients often were poor communicators and as a result could make it difficult for them to be treated by doctors and nurses. But they should never be blamed for this; they are victims of their diseases. They require extra care and attention. And their recovery should never be rushed.

Outside of Florence Nightingale and nurses, the patient is the most prominent person in this book. It is clear the whole reason for the book is to make sure the patient gets the care they require and deserve. The patient should always be a priority for anyone who chooses the nursing profession. Clearly, part of the definition of what nursing is to Florence Nightingale includes the care and healing of the patient.

Sir Edward Cook

Her biographer who said "This is one of the best known and best books..."

Queen Victoria

After reading this book she said, "She should be in charge of the War office." She also recognizes Florence's thoroughness.



MacAuley

Miss Nightingale quotes his summary. To paraphrase, "Men have infinite knowledge of the heavens, but only myopic, limited knowledges of the human mind."

Dr. Angus Smith

Suggests "air test" to be performed on every sick room. Also suggests that a railway carriage is as unhealthy as a sewer.

Dr. Christison

Suggests meat tea or beef juice will calm the stomach where stomach maladies are prevalent.

Lehman

Suggests that coffee reduces body waste by one-fourth, attributable to an experiment he conducted.

Nurses

These were caregivers, who were girls and women aged 5 years and up, who were faced with caring for the health and perhaps very existence of their employers. "Nearly half of all domestic nurses were between the ages of 5 and 20" according to the 1851 census.

Patients

At this time patients ranged from shellshocked Crimean War vets to children with mumps. Since there was no delimiter on patients, the professional nurse was expected to handle it all.

Houdin - the Conjuror

Said, in reference to reading out loud to a patient, "the way to make a story seem short is to tell it slowly."

Harriet Martineau

A proponent of Florence Nightingale and an outspoken advocate.



Objects/Places

Air

Florence Nightingale discussed clean air flow around the patient as the most important environmental factor affecting a patient's health

House Health

Florence Nightingale discussed the importance of the inside and outside environment of the house and how it contributed or detracted from the patient's health

Noise

Florence Nightingale discussed the importance of the absence of negative noise in the patient environment and the benefits of positive noise on the patient's health.

Variety

Florence Nightingale discusses the importance of variety in the patient's day. Variety served to break up the monotony of being sick and included simple things such as a look out of a window or the delivery of flowers to the patient.

Food

Florence Nightingale discusses the importance of all aspects of food, from preparation to delivery to observing what the patient ate to the positive and negative qualities of different kinds of food.

Beds and Bedding

Florence Nightingale discusses the importance of the proper bed on a patient's health and what should be done to maintain a sterile sleeping environment.

Light

Florence Nightingale discusses the importance of access to sunshine on the patient's health. She notes that patients will always turn toward any light source in the room.



Observation

This is the most important quality a nurse should possess. Accurate observation of the patient can often mean the difference between life and death.

Beef Tea

Created by boiling a chunk of beef, Florence Nightingale makes two important comments about it. First, it is not as nutritious as most people think, and, second, it will often agree with the patient's digestive system when other food will not.

Education

Florence Nightingale notes that the education of nurses, is her main goal of the book and is one of the only things that would change the quality of patient care on a large enough scale to make a difference.



Themes

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is a big theme with Florence Nightingale. In each of her main points in the book, she stresses cleanliness. Clean air, clean food and a clean body. This emphasis on cleanliness comes from her many years of experience as a war nurse, where conditions were deplorable, to a house nurse where laziness or ineptitude certainly caused death. After seeing so much death caused by such preventable oversights, Florence Nightingale lost her tolerance for laziness and ineptitude. She says, "Patience and resignation in her (the nurse) are but other words for carelessness or indifference - contemptible, if in regard to herself; culpable, if in regard to her sick." To her there was little to no excuse for neglecting the patient, except education. That is why, shortly after publishing this book, she opened the Nightingale Training School of Nurses at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. She stresses the point that there is no detail minute enough, in regard to the sick person's environment that should be overlooked. She goes so far as mentioning that any cup of tea served to the patient must have a dry bottom rim so as not to dribble on the patient's shirt front and cause him stress.

Empathy

If there is one theme that is prevalent in all parts of this book, it is empathy. Florence Nightingale stresses over and over that the nurse should try to see and experience things as the patient does. She draws the reader into the patient experience and confronts them with the limited choices the patient has. In the part about variety, she describes how the patient suffers through the hours looking at the ceiling and the knotholes in the wooden walls. She then tells how the delivery of a bunch of flowers changes the patient's mood and how, in her own experience, she began to get better immediately. She continues to bring the reader into the world of the sick person at every stage of recovery and presents scenarios that illustrate the correct and incorrect way to treat the patient at that level of illness. In the section on petty management, she says, in regard to handling the patient's mail, "It is evidently much less exertion for a patient to answer a letter for himself" than to have the nurse do it because the patient will experience all of the emotional effects of sending a letter, plus the anxiety of the involvement of the nurse. By doing this, she exemplifies the difference between a lay person and a nurse. She stresses that empathy is a quality that a person must have before they are able to become good nurse.

Observation

Florence Nightingale says that observation is the most important aptitude a nurse should have. She says, "but if you cannot get the habit of observation one way or other, you had better give up the being a nurse, for it is not your calling, however kind and



anxious you may be." She stresses, without fail, in each section of her book, how important observation is. She goes through great pains to give examples of good observation: "I have know a nurse in charge of a set of wards, who"... kept in her head everything her patients had fixed for themselves and had eaten... and bad observation: "I have known another nurse in charge of one single patient, who took away his meals day after day all but untouched, and never knew it." Her extraordinary powers of observation singularly set Florence Nightingale apart from all other nurses. These powers of observation allowed her to comment expertly on topics that have seemingly nothing to do with nursing, such as the construction of houses, the design of plumbing and the qualities of ambient light. She was able to observe the fact that patient care included much more than the care of the patient himself, but included everything around the patient, and everything with which the patient might come in contact.



Style

Perspective

Florence Nightingale's perspective was greatly influenced by her unusually-extensive experience as a nurse. Miss Nightingale was thirty-nine years old when she wrote this book. She had been a nurse for fourteen years. She had been the Lady Superintendent in Charge of female nursing in the English General Military Hospital for two years during the Crimean War and had studied for many years at practically every medically-related institution in England in an effort to improve the entire system of nursing. It was from this "seen-it-all" perspective that Florence Nightingale formulated this book. This experience gave her the confidence and authority to speak her mind about what she saw wrong with nursing at that time. She carefully presents her case for the reforms she thinks should be made, then artfully writes about the stark reality of how she has seen things done. She presents her case almost like a lawyer, so that the reader may benefit from hearing both sides of the argument. When she "suggests" how things could be done, many times she offers death as the alternative. This serves to make it difficult to even consider an alternative. While oversights, ineptitude and laziness are certainly not unique to the nursing industry, Florence Nightingale peels away the ambiguity so prevalent in personal relationships and displays how these negative qualities in a nurse can lead to patient death.

Tone

The tone of this work is between combative and objective. This is to be expected as on one hand, Miss Nightingale writes as someone who is fighting for the lives of patients all over the world. On the other hand, she knows that there is a large education gap that must be bridged between the perceptions of the general public and of new nurses and of the reality of patient care. First, she presents her knowledgeable, objective opinion on a topic and then backs it up with poignant examples. She takes great care to not turn her audience against her cause, so she details specific examples to which almost anyone can relate. The result is for the reader to either offer a better alternative or to comply with Miss Nightingale. Since the general public was at that time, and mostly at this time, so ignorant of a patient's experience, the day is usually won by Miss Nightingale's propositions. The tone does get intolerant and testy with lackadaisical attitudes in nurses, as would be expected by someone who has seen the destruction those attitudes can cause. Miss Nightingale offers revolutionary solutions, and so this work sometimes sounds like the work of a revolutionary.

Structure

This book has a relatively simple structure of broad topics refined out to specific suggestions. There are thirteen main parts, not counting the conclusion. Under each



part, a suggestion is made about the environment of patient care. Then, an explanation is offered as to why the suggestion is made. Finally, specific, practical examples, both with the suggestion and without of each topic are fleshed out with the inevitable conclusion affirming the initial suggestion made. For example, under the topic of food, a suggestion is made that a patient's food intake should be carefully monitored so that the doctor and the nurse know what agrees with the patient and what does not. Also, the strength and improvement of the patient can be determined from this information. Then she proceeds to cite examples of what happened to a patient whose food intake was not monitored. Usually the patient got worse. And what happened to the patient whose food intake was monitored. The patient got better, or adjustment to the diet was made, or the time of day the food was offered was adjusted, and, as a result, the patient got better. This repetitive structure suggests that Florence Nightingale was not writing to entertain or tell a story, but to instruct. The format is more akin to a written description of what a person might hear if they went on rounds with Miss Nightingale over her lifetime.



Quotes

"My heart always sinks within me when I hear the good housewife of every class, say, 'I assure you the bed has been well slept in,' and I can only hope that it is not true. What? is the bed already saturated with someone else's damp before my patient comes to exhale in it his own damp? Has it not had a chance to be aired? No, not one. 'It has been slept in every night.'" pg. 81

"I do not pretend to teach her how, I ask her to teach herself, and for this purpose I venture to give her some hints." pg. 4

"The reparative process which Nature has instituted and which we call disease, has been hindered by some want of knowledge or attention, in one or in all of these things, and pain, suffering, or interruption of the whole process sets in." pg. 8

"It has been said and written scores of times, that every woman makes a good nurse. I believe, on the contrary, that the very elements of nursing are all but unknown." pg. 8

"To attempt to keep a ward warm at the expense of making the sick repeatedly breathe their own hot, humid, putrescing atmosphere is a certain way to delay recovery or to destroy life." pg. 16

"Is it not a fact that when scarlet fever, measles or small-pox appear among the children, the very first thought which occurs is, 'where' the children could have 'caught' the disease? And their parents immediately run over in their minds all the families with whom they may have been. They never think of looking at home for the source of their mischief." pg.27

"It appears as if the part of a mistress now is to complain of her servants, and to accept their excuses - not to show them how there need be neither complaints made nor excuses." pg. 29

"Yes, God always justifies His ways. He is teaching while you are not learning." pg. 30

"To be 'in charge' is certainly not only to carry out the proper measures yourself but to see that every one else does so too; to see that no one dither willfully or ignorantly thwarts or prevents such measures." pg. 42

"Always sit within the patient's view, so that when you speak to him he has not painfully to turn his head round to look at you." pg. 49

"But if you cannot get the habit of observation one way or other, you had better give up being a nurse, for it is not your calling, however kind and anxious you may be." pg. 113

"It is often thought that medicine is the curative process. It is no such thing; medicine is the surgery of functions, as surgery proper is that of limbs and organs. Neither can do anything but remove obstructions; neither can cure; nature alone cures." pg. 133



"It seems a commonly received idea among men and even among women themselves that it requires nothing but disappointment in love, the want of an object, a general disgust, or incapacity for other things, to turn a woman into a good nurse." pg. 133



Topics for Discussion

Why is it so important to have proper ventilation and fresh air available to a sick ward?

Give some examples of ways poorly-constructed houses contributed to the mortality rate in the time around 1859.

What are some examples of the types of noise Florence Nightingale suggested should be minimized in a sick ward?

What is the importance of variety in a patient's daily routine?

What were some misconceptions about different types of food around the time Florence Nightingale composed this work?

Why was it important that a patient's bed not be too big?

Why did Florence Nightingale suggest a patient be moved to a different bed every twelve hours if possible?

What are some environmental considerations of a sick room that are of little concern in a healthy person's bedroom?

Why did Florence Nightingale suggest that it was dangerous to the patient's health to contest the opinion of the doctor?

What were some misconceptions about the personal qualities of women wishing to become nurses?