

# East Indian girls urged to enter health field

Public health services are for everyone, but occasionally the dedicated nurses find it difficult to inform the non English speaking public of the services available to them.

An interesting evening spent at the home of Pat Hocker, R.N.BSC.N. revealed some interesting aspects of the life of a public health nurse in the Cowichan Valley. Hocker works out of the Lake Cowichan health unit and her district reaches as far as Yubou, Cayuse and Paldi.

When I asked if she encountered much of a language problem with the East Indian people, she assured me it was not a major problem as most of the husbands speak English. However, she added she would prefer to be able to communicate on a woman to woman basis as her duties most often bring her into contact with young mothers and mothers-to-be.

It is essential from the health point of view that she see the prospective mothers as early as possible to discuss the nutrition that is so important to the babies health. The next important step comes during the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy when prospective parents attend the pre natal classes at their local health unit.

To overcome the language barrier that sometimes is a problem the ministry of health has prepared a video recording of a talk between a young mother-to-be and her woman doctor. In the film the

young mother-to-be hears the answers to all the worrisome questions that have been bothering her and is encouraged to attend pre natal classes.

As well as the video the health nurse has pamphlets printed in the Punjabi language covering birth control, infant nutrition, breast feeding, Canada's Food Guide and one on the on-going problem in the schools, head lice. This film and the brochures are available to anyone.

Immunization of babies and children is an important duty of the community health nurse and questions that must be answered by parents before immunization is carried out are currently being translated so that East Indian people will fully understand what information the nurse requires.

Hocker assured me she enjoys calling at the homes of the East Indian people. To use her words "They are a most delightful people." And they are always so concerned about their children. The

grandparents are especially devoted to the little ones and they are so eager to please, always pressing the nurse to stay for tea and refreshments when unfortunately her busy schedule does not leave enough time to stay and visit. She laughingly told me that the East Indian men are the only ones who offer to carry the baby scales into the house.

A most rewarding aspect of her job says Hocker is watching the children grow and progress and developing long term relationships with so many families. In the schools public health nurses also check the children's hearing and vision as well as instructing them in proper health practices. Another facet of her job is communicable disease-investigation. This enables P.H. authorities to keep track of all communicable diseases.

Providing immunization for travellers is another function of the nurse even though there are not as many requirements for people travelling to India now. Prospec-

tive travellers should contact the health unit eight weeks before departure. All immunization records should be kept and taken to the Health Unit when the need for immunization next arises.

When I asked how important it is that more East Indian girls enter the field of public health, Hocker assured me they would greatly enhance the service that is provided. Local girls could take their first two years at either Malaspina or Camosun College then two years at either UVIC or UBC to obtain a Bachelor of Science in nursing. She says it is a very interesting and personally rewarding branch of nursing particularly from the standpoint of educating people, improving their health and preventing illness.

A public health nurse has more time to sit and listen and as each nurse has taken an oath of secrecy anyone who needs professional help but doesn't know where to turn can seek help from any of the nurses with no fear of them divulging the problem.

## Indo Canadian

Joan Mayo

