

A Painful Period of Adjustment: A Nurse from Vietnam's Experience Working in an American Hospital

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Vuong Hue was born in Vietnam; for the past seven years, she has been working as a nurse in a large American hospital. Hue received her training in Vietnam, but her initial experience working in America was a rude awakening; the expectations of a nurse in Vietnam were markedly different than for an American nurse. Her adjustment to this new world of nursing was met with confusion and unhappiness for her, and hostility from her co-workers.



Hue's experience: before fleeing her war-ravaged native country, Hue had been happy in her nursing position. In Vietnam, she had but one function: to provide professional technical care. Nurses were responsible only for giving medications, taking vital signs, and changing dressings per doctors' orders. They were not required to attend to the patient or family's emotional needs. Nor did they have to bathe, feed, or turn the patient, or make the patient's bed.

Four roles of American nurses: to provide professional technical care; to provide non-specialized care (e.g., bathing patients); to serve as patient advocates; and to provide psychosocial nursing.

Co-workers response to Hue: her coworkers thought she was stuck-up because she acted as if bathing patients and cleaning bedpans were beneath her dignity. Other nurses tended to avoid her and resented having to do some of the tasks that she wasn't willing to do. This attitude only added to Hue's sense of alienation.

Hue's attitude: she actually wasn't 'stuck up', she just wasn't used to having to do these tasks as a nurse in her native country. Psychosocial nursing was unnecessary from her point of view; more than that, Hue viewed it as improper. The patient's family took care of personal issues; it was rude for her to pry into her patients' personal lives.

Hue's adjustment: it took Hue several years to adjust, but she eventually became accustomed to the different roles that American nurses must take. Over time, her coworkers no longer saw her as stuck-up and began to regard her as an accountable team member.

Strategies for orienting foreign-born nurses: it would be helpful for American hospitals to have special in-service programs for foreign nurses during orientation in order to explicitly discuss the differences in nursing roles in various cultures. It would go a long way toward avoiding misunderstanding and help with the adjustment of new nurses to their environment. It would also be helpful for American-born nurses to inquire about a foreign nurse's experience; that gesture could help curtail unflattering assumptions and perhaps facilitate the adjustment of the foreign-born nurse to a new culture.

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