

NIGHTINGALE IN TROUBLE

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My best friend Ayako and I were inseparable when we were little. We went to the same nursery, we shared our toys and we had the same dream. We both wanted to be nurses. We would pretend we were nurses working in hospitals, and play all day long and we promised that when we grew up we would work at the same hospital. This was when we were five years old. I forgot about this dream as soon as I moved away but Ayako never gave up. I met her recently and asked her, "How's life as a nurse?" But she answered me sadly, "I couldn't make it." She told me that she applied to nine schools but she failed all exams and she had to decide to give up her dream and go to college. But to me something sounded wrong. What bothered me was the news I heard a few days before. This news was reporting that there was such a shortage of nurses that it was turning into a crisis. Did this mean that Ayako was just dumb and couldn't pass the tests?

After hearing more from Ayako I learned that Ayako wasn't dumb, she was one of the top five students in her high school. But, instead there was an overflow of students applying for nursing colleges. For example, at the Red Cross Hospital they were accepting forty students and over one thousand applied. There are many girls who want to become nurses, but they can't get the education.

But in Japan there is a problem of the lack of nurses. You might say, "Who cares, they don't do much anyway." Well, I thought so too, but I was wrong. Without nurses, it is impossible for hospitals to function. When you are in a hospital, you are weak physically and mentally. The doctors can fix you physically, but only the nurses will stand by your side and give you moral support to fix you mentally, too. Also, they assist doctors in their work; they prepare for operations and they check on all patients. And this is only a part of what they do. Most of their work nobody notices, but without nurses it would be impossible to practice medicine. But because of the lack of nurses, these nurses are forced to overwork and many nurses are even dying in car accidents after getting off the night shift.

I believe that this shortage of nurses is caused by the lack of number of students that are educated to become nurses. In fact, there are only seventy-four nursing colleges in Japan. But, the Ministry of Health

and Welfare thinks differently. They think that if they decrease the working hours for the nurses, the nurses will not be overworked resulting to more happy nurses and less nurses quitting their jobs. This is a good idea if they could decrease the number of working hours radically, but their plan is to decrease five hours of working hours and one night shift. And according to a nurse working at Saiseikai Hospital in Tamachi, even if this plan is put into action it wouldn't make any difference. But the worst thing of all is that this plan was announced seventeen years ago but it still hasn't been put into action. Also hearing this plan, it gives the idea that there aren't any people who want to become nurses to the public. Making it seem like because there aren't many people who want the job, the only option the government can give is to decrease the amount of working hours. But this is a lie. As you know by now there are a lot of people who want to become nurses.

I have a better idea. The reason why there aren't enough nursing schools is because it costs too much to educate a nurse. For example, at a nursing college in Machida, Tokyo they announced that it costs 1.7 million yen besides the tuition to educate a student a year. Meaning that by the time one student graduates from a nursing college 5.1 million yen will be invested in this student. If the government can provide money to help nursing colleges, our country would be able to educate more nurses, which means more working nurses and less overworked nurses. Also, national hospitals have enough facilities to build nursing colleges inside them, if we can build a nursing college in every national hospital, it would help provide the education for the nurses. With all this if we could create a new job which helps nurses in areas which do not involve patients directly like changing the sheets or preparing for operations, we would be able to decrease the work load at the same time.

What we can do is make the government change their proposition from changing the working hours into providing money for nursing colleges and creating a new job which would lighten the nurses work load. By bringing up this proposition to newspapers and politicians, we can put pressure on the government to put their proposition into work this time.

I really hope that some day girls like my best friend Ayako who really want to become nurses and qualify will be able to be given a fair chance and be able to make their dreams come true.