

Nurses in the Revolutionary War

Nurses in the American Revolution were camp followers, local volunteers, and enlisted individuals who provided crucial, organized medical care. General George Washington established a formal ratio of one nurse for every 10 patients, relying heavily on women traveling with the army. Women nurses also assisted in inoculating the troops for Smallpox. This was dangerous work.

Organization and Pay

- **Staffing Ratios:** The Continental Army aimed for 1 nurse per 10 to 15 patients in military hospitals.
- **Compensation:** Initial pay started at \$2 per month in 1775, increasing to \$4 in 1776, and \$8 by 1777 to combat severe labor shortages.
- **Diverse Labor:** Due to staff shortages, pacifist groups like Quakers and Moravians, along with local families and male soldiers, were frequently pressed into nursing.

Daily Duties and Hardships

- **Core Tasks:** Fed and bathed patients, changed linens, emptied chamber pots, and swept hospital wards.
- **Hygiene and Maintenance:** Disinfected rooms with vinegar, washed heavy loads of laundry, and prepared basic herbal remedies.
- **High Risk:** Caregivers faced extreme exposure to deadly camp diseases like smallpox and typhus, resulting in high mortality rates among hospital staff.