

## The Overwork of Nurses and its Results.

**H**ARDLY a day passes in which we do not receive, from one source or another, accounts of the disastrous results of the insufficiency of the Nursing Staff of our Workhouse Wards and Infirmaries, and, in consequence, the terrible strain, both mental and physical, to which Nurses employed in those Institutions are subjected. We, therefore, shall do all in our power to make the matter public, both for the sake of the sick poor, and in justice to such Nurses as find themselves overpowered by the unjust system under which they attempt to perform their duties.

At the weekly meeting of the Oldham Board of Guardians the subject of two recent deaths—one from suicide, the other from poisoning—on which we briefly commented last week, was discussed, and the Acting Clerk read the following correspondence, which had been received from Dr. Young, the Medical Officer, and the Coroner:—

“Park House, Royton, Oldham, August 15, 1894.

“Dear Sir,—I have made some recommendations to the Board to-day, which I trust they will take into their favourable consideration. I desire also to point out that I have hitherto refrained from making any recommendation to the Board, because not only has my appointment not yet been confirmed by the Local Government Board, but on account of my very recent appointment, and my consequent imperfect information as to the requirements of so large a place as the workhouse.—I am, Sir, yours sincerely,

RALPH YOUNG.

The coroner sent two communications. The first was concerning the death of Roger Cole, and stated that the jury empanelled had returned a verdict of “Suicide whilst of unsound mind,” and that the jurors recommended “that the Board of Guardians be notified that in their opinion the nursing at the workhouse infirmary is insufficient, especially in the night, and the employment of inmates as Nurses in such cases as this is unsatisfactory.” With regard to the death of Ellen Radcliffe, the coroner said the verdict was “Death by poisoning from a dose of atropine administered by misadventure,” and added that the jury recommended “that the nursing staff of the workhouse be increased in the night, and that in future all poisonous drugs be dispensed in coloured and fluted bottles in place of ordinary phials as in this case.” In the medical officer’s report-book, Dr. Young wrote:—“At present too many beds are allotted to one Nurse throughout the Infirmary, so that the patients cannot have the attention they require during the day, and at night one Nurse is quite insufficient for the whole. Neither is there any provision for cases requiring extra Nursing, or for the temporary illness or disablement of a Nurse. The whole of the Nursing at the workhouse is conducted on an entirely wrong principle. There is no responsible head, no means of maintaining discipline amongst the Nurses, or of ascertaining whether their duties are properly discharged during the absence of the medical officer. A ward should never be left without a Nurse in attendance. In order that the nursing of the sick may be placed on a sound footing I would strongly recommend that there should not be less than three night Nurses at the infirmary, and that no Nurse should be engaged on constant night duty. The night nursing should be done by the Probationers taking alternate duty every week. The

Head Nurse or Superintendent should not be attached to any particular ward, but should have charge of ‘B’ (or the administrative) block, and should have control, together with the medical officer, over the whole of the Nursing in the infirmary. To accomplish these ends it will be necessary to engage three new probationers and one charge Nurse in addition to the present staff. We shall then have a Nurse in charge of each block, a Probationer in charge of each flat, a night Nurse in each block, and a Superintendent of the whole. No other arrangement will be satisfactory.”—Mr. Jenner Fust, at this point, said he had come down that afternoon, as the chairman had said, in consequence of those two unfortunate occurrences the previous week, but he had no intention of going into the cases. They were under the consideration of the Guardians, and he had very much rather the Board dealt with them without interference of any kind. He was quite sure that any weak points which had been, or which might be revealed, would be dealt with by the Guardians in a satisfactory manner, and his only reason for making a few observations was that he was anxious to emphasise the recommendations of their medical officer which had just been read, and to draw their attention to the very close resemblance those recommendations bore to the recommendations which were made by Dr. Downes when he visited the workhouse in the beginning of 1892. They both advised the appointment of a Superintendent Nurse and the increasing of the nursing staff. There was one point on which he did not quite follow their medical officer. The latter seemed to contemplate the night nursing being done by Probationers. He felt sure that Dr. Young in making that recommendation was prompted by his wish not to recommend any increase of the nursing staff that could possibly be avoided, and that he would prefer, at all events, there should be one Charge Nurse having to do with the night nursing besides the Probationers. He was sure every one would agree that it was not desirable to trust night Nursing entirely to Probationers. Of course, the consideration of their nursing staff would bring up again the old question whether it was possible to dispense altogether with pauper assistance in their nursing arrangements. It was more and more becoming the custom to-day to have the whole work done by paid servants. He felt convinced that the matter would be dealt with speedily and thoroughly, and he felt with the medical officer that he had been too new to his duties hitherto to consider himself in a position to make general recommendations as to the management of that institution. The recommendations which he had now submitted showed that he quite grasped the situation, and he was sure the Guardians would receive every assistance from him in any reorganisation they made.—The Chairman pointed out that since 1892, when Dr. Downes made his recommendations, the Guardians had increased the nursing staff by six.—Mr. Fust said that Dr. Downes recommended one Superintendent, four Charge Nurses, and eight Probationers, and that one Charge Nurse and two Probationers should be told off for night duty. They had now in the hospital three Charge Nurses and six Probationers, so that to come up to Dr. Downes’s recommendations they would have to still increase their staff by one Superintendent, one Charge Nurse, and two Probationers.—The Chairman: We have four Charge Nurses already.—Mr. Fust: Oh, have you. I thought there were three. Then you would have to increase by one Superintendent and two Probationers. Continuing, he said he was quite aware that the Guardians had added to their nursing staff since Dr. Downes made his recommendations, and that there had been a little difficulty caused by the fact that they could not provide accommodation for a further increased nursing staff.—The Chairman observed that he did not think the last statement made by the Inspector had influenced the Guardians. It was not because they had insufficient accommodation for the Nurses that they had not further increased the staff, but simply because the Guardians, having increased that staff by 50 per cent., were of opinion that they had gone far enough in that direction.—Mr. Horrobin thought the Guardians had in-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)