

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

By BEDFORD FENWICK, M.D.,

Late Senior Assistant Physician to the City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.

CHAPTER II.

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THE warmth and ventilation of the room, then, being carefully provided for, the next point for the nurse to observe is the condition of the patient's skin; and, especially, in view of what has just been said, to guard against the formation of bed-sores. If the patient is allowed out of bed, the nurse will probably be directed by the doctor to persuade him to walk about the room from time to time, instead of constantly remaining seated or lying down. The advantage of such gentle movement is obvious. It exercises the muscles of the limbs, and therefore not only prevents them from wasting, as they rapidly do in elderly people, if disused, but also assists materially in the circulation of the blood through the venous system, and thus aids the heart in pumping the blood through the thickened vessels of the emphysematous lungs. It is a practical fact which is worthy of notice that this exercise should be made as little as possible of the penance and trouble which many a patient considers it to be; and by taking his arm and walking about the room with him, discussing some congenial subject, the tedium of the movement will be less observed, and so it will be less objected to. This is only one illustration, however, of the manifold methods in which a tactful nurse can lighten the burden of these patients' illness; and it is worth remembering that many of the elderly patients who suffer from emphysema are men and women who have led lives of great mental and bodily activity, and to whom the mere restraint and confinement to a bedroom, therefore, is much more depressing than it would be to one who had all through his life been more or less of an invalid.

In the next place, with regard to the diet, the patient requires, as a rule, a very considerable amount of nourishment. The doctor usually restricts the amount of fluid to be taken, in these cases, in order to limit the amount of blood circulating in the vessels, and thus to lighten the work of the right side of the Heart. For it is evident that the more blood there is in the vessels, the more work

will the Heart be called on to perform. There is a further advantage in this restriction of fluid, inasmuch as the tendency to effusion from the blood vessels into the surrounding tissues of the lungs is thereby lessened; and so the dropsy of the organs, to which attention has recently been drawn, and which is such a dangerous condition, is prevented or at least minimised. With regard, otherwise, to the administration of food and stimulants, the general rule of small quantities, given frequently, is usually followed. It is more agreeable to the patient, and therefore more easily managed by the nurse: and it is certainly more effective for maintaining the bodily strength, for reasons which have been already explained. The question of stimulants in these cases is much debated, and does not concern the nurse, as each practitioner will undoubtedly define the precise quantities to be administered to the particular patient. But it is a fact which nurses should remember that in some of these cases alcohol frequently upsets the digestive organs, and so increases the patient's discomfort, if not his actual danger. And it is therefore always well to take down in writing the doctor's definite instructions as to the quantity and kind of stimulant which the patient is to take.

One final practical point of importance remains to be emphasised. It will be understood from what has already been said that the condition of the kidneys in these cases is of extreme importance. The nurse should, therefore, examine a sample of the urine every morning, and note both the specific gravity and the presence or absence of albumen, in her report to the doctor, and measure more or less accurately the quantity of urine passed in each 24 hours. For the medical treatment will be modified according to the presence or absence of congestion of the kidneys, and the manner in which they are excreting from the system its waste materials.

As a general rule, the temperature in these cases tells but little of the progress of the disease, but it should always be taken and carefully charted, night and morning, because it may be a very valuable warning of danger. For example, a sudden rise frequently shows the occurrence of a fresh inflammatory attack, while a sudden fall sometimes is the precursor of an attack of hæmorrhage. If either deviation from the normal be at all marked, the fact should be immediately reported to the doctor.

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