

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

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CHAPTER IV.

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WITH the precautions mentioned, this treatment can be carried out easily and effectively; and it undoubtedly lowers the temperature, and therefore relieves the urgent symptoms due to the pyrexia, more rapidly than any other form of nursing treatment.

The next point to be considered is the maintenance of the patient's strength; because, however slight the attack, and however normal its course may be, it invariably causes considerable depression both of the mental and bodily powers. The administration of nourishment and stimulants, therefore, is a most essential part of the nursing. The doctor will invariably dictate the amount of stimulants which is to be given in the twenty-four hours; but he will probably leave the precise times and quantities of the administration, to a considerable extent, to the nurse's discretion, because Pneumonia is a disease in which the most experienced nurse is the best nurse for the patient.

It may be laid down, as general rules, that, in the treatment of disease, stimulants are good medicines, but are otherwise useless; and that, whenever there is inflammation of any internal organ, the less stimulant the patient requires, the more rapidly will he recover. Perhaps, this is only another way of saying that medical practitioners at the present day only give alcohol to patients who are seriously ill—in other words, to those whose heart power seems failing under the stress of their illness. It has already been pointed out in these Lectures that small doses of alcohol frequently administered, exhibit better results than larger doses given less seldom. But, in cases of Pneumonia, the quantity of alcohol which may be required by the patient may vary from day to day, and even from hour to hour.

The practitioner estimates the amount of stimulant which the heart needs, from day to day, by the strength of the contraction of the ventricles, or by the first sound heard at the apex of the heart. The experienced nurse can, to a less extent, gauge the requirements of the patient by the condition of his pulse, that is to

say by its rapidity and its fulness. As it is inadvisable to enter into needless refinements which would only confuse those unversed in the processes of disease, it is necessary, as usual, to be somewhat dogmatic. So it may be said that the pulse which is difficult to feel at the wrist, and in which the blood does not seem to fill the artery, as it flows through it, may be regarded for all practical purposes, in cases of illness, as evidence of the patient's heart-weakness and exhaustion, and of the consequent want of stimulant. Again, a very rapid pulse, in cases of Pneumonia, generally indicates the need of stimulants.

It may be laid down as a general and important practical rule, in any case of illness, that a pulse of normal rate, that is to say between seventy and eighty beats to the minute, does not indicate any need for stimulants; just as it may be accepted as indicating that the patient is in no immediate danger. On the other hand, when the heart is weak, it is always irritable, and therefore more rapid in its contractions; and the greater its rapidity, the greater may the danger of the patient be regarded, and, as a general rule, the greater will be the need of stimulants. There is, however, one most important exception to this rule which few nurses realize. It is quite possible to give a patient too much alcohol, and thereby to produce the very rapidity of the pulse which has been said to denote the need of stimulation.

A physician was recently called to see a patient suffering from Pneumonia. The patient was delirious, and his pulse-rate was 140 to the minute, but it was full, hard, and bounding—not the small, weak, and compressible pulse, which, as already noted, is the strongest evidence of the need of the system for stimulation. Moreover the breath smelt most strongly of alcohol. Inquiries elicited the fact that his nurse had never been properly trained, and that she had given the patient nearly a bottle of brandy a day; because she had misunderstood the written directions of the doctor, and instead of drachm doses, had administered an ounce of the spirit at a time. The patient, in fact, was intoxicated—and the new symptoms were masking those of his disease.

The alcohol was doing him infinite harm instead of good, because it was impairing his nutrition, while it also increased the very weakness which the brandy was prescribed in order to lessen and remove.

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