

How to Prepare Nurses for the Duties of Alumnæ.*

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THE first thoughts that arise in the mind when endeavouring to deal with this subject, are: What are the objects of Alumnæ Associations; what are the duties of Alumnæ?

In order to answer these questions a few of the many constitutions and by-laws were consulted, and there seemed to be but little variation in the articles dealing with "objects." They are all practically summed up in Article II. of the Constitution of the Associated Alumnæ, which reads: "The objects of this Association shall be: to establish and maintain a code of ethics; to elevate the standard of nursing education; to promote the usefulness and honour, the financial and other interests of the nursing profession."

It would seem, therefore, that the principal duties of the Alumnæ must be to aid in carrying out the various clauses of this article. Only a few years ago, Nurses' Alumnæ Associations were almost unknown. Each nurse, as she left her training school, found herself a struggling unit, with no professional code of ethics to guide her actions, and no means of keeping up her connection with other members of her profession. Naturally, her tendency under these conditions was to become a mere working woman, doing so much work for so much money, and thinking only of her own material welfare.

As a result, the status of the profession was lowered, and many were thereby deterred from entering hospital training schools, who might have proven themselves most useful members.

To-day almost every school has its Alumnæ Association, and the majority of these have united to form the Associated Alumnæ of the United States and Canada. Thus we have, in many parts of this great continent, Alumnæ who have agreed to establish and maintain a code of ethics; who have agreed to elevate the standard of nursing education; who have agreed to promote the usefulness and honour of the nursing profession, as well as its more material interests. In "union is strength," and it surely seems as if much must be accomplished in the future, as it has been in the near past. It only requires that the women who are daily entering our ranks shall be so prepared, that they may have a true understanding of what their duties as Alumnæ are.

When a woman decides to study nursing, she does so generally because she can secure for herself a profession in return for work done, and without any first outlay of money. The number

of those who enter training schools for other reasons is small. They enter with but a vague idea of the duties they will be called upon to perform. Visions, perhaps of smoothing pillows, administering medicines, reading to patients, may have fired their enthusiasm, and they see themselves being and doing something noble. But as we all know, while a hospital is admirably fitted for turning out well trained and skilful nurses, it is not the best school for developing the special qualities essential to a woman who is to take her proper place in the world, or, indeed, in her own profession. The necessary routine, the wholesale nursing, the strict obedience required, the technical skill gained long before the theoretical knowledge follows to render the work intelligent, all tend to make mechanical workers; the long, hard hours of enforced work tend to develop selfishness; the short time allowed for recreation, and the long time spent in absorbing ideas within restricted limits, cause a narrowing of the mind.

On entering a training school, the first shock received by the would-be nurse, more especially if she has come direct from a home-life, is the realization that she has lost her individuality. No one cares what she is, or how she feels, so long as her share of the work is accomplished.

This at first seems cruel, but she often becomes hardened, and is herself as careless of the feelings of the next-comer. Then, having a certain portion of the hard work allotted to her to be finished within a given time, she is tempted to regard the calls of patients, or of other nurses, as so many unwelcome interruptions, and a disposition to be selfish and unfeeling comes to light. Again, she finds herself hedged in by rules of which she cannot see the use, and a rebellious feeling is apt to arise, followed by a certain changed attitude of mind toward the one in authority, whose duty it is to enforce such rules, with the result that she who desires to be, and should be, the guide and friend as well as teacher, is often regarded only as a hard task-master and an unmerciful judge.

The question how best to check these tendencies in the pupil-nurse is a difficult one to answer. There is no present prospect for her of gaining the theoretical knowledge as the young doctor does before entering the hospital wards. This in itself would be of infinite value, as it would render the nurses' work both intelligent and interesting, and check the tendency to become mechanical.

Neither is there any immediate prospect in the majority of schools, of shortening the hours of work or of giving more opportunity for recreation. It is, therefore, useless to discuss these points at this time, we can only acknowledge that the tendencies are there, and that it is our duty to do what lies in our power to correct them.

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