

Medical Matters.

THE LIGHT TREATMENT.



AN interesting account of the "Light Treatment" of skin diseases dependent upon bacterial influences, as it is carried out at the London Hospital, is given by the *British Medical Journal* in its last issue.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE LIGHT TREATMENT.

These are as follows:—

1. That the chemical rays of the sun, or of the electric light, can produce an inflammation of the skin.
2. That they can produce an effect through the skin.
3. That they can kill microbes on, in, or close under the skin.

The problem as to how to bring this light to bear on the micro-organisms contained in the tissues of the skin has been studied by Professor Finsen of Copenhagen for some years, and for the last three years he has treated patients by the method he has evolved. Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales, was so interested in this treatment on one of her visits to Denmark, that she presented to the London Hospital an apparatus similar to that employed by Professor Finsen, and the first of the kind used in this country.

The room in which the indoor treatment of lupus is at present carried out is at the end of a substantial iron building, which contains relief wards required during structural alterations of the hospital. Both wards and the room proper to the light department are beautifully light and airy. The room, which is kept scrupulously clean, has arranged round its walls glass reservoirs of anti-septic lotions, basins for purifying the hands and arms of the nurses who administer the treatment, and nests of pigeon holes for the dressings and towels of the individual patients. The electric arc lamp, suspended in the centre of the room bears an inscription that it was the gift of H.R.H. The Princess of Wales, who also presented the lenses necessary for the treatment by sunlight.

The patients under treatment either recline on light movable iron couches, or sit in light rocking chairs which can be tilted to any desired angle, as the plan which is found most expeditious is to focus the patient to the light,

rather than the light to the patient. The nurses who administer the treatment are superintended by a Sister who has visited the Finsen Institute. They wear washable overalls, and work with sterilized uncovered arms. One nurse is allotted to each patient, and during the sitting she presses the cooling lens on the area of skin to be treated. The cooling lenses, as well as the hands of the nurses, are carefully sterilised after each sitting.

For the sunlight treatment a portion of the hospital tennis ground is fenced off with a light scaffolding on which canvas is to be stretched to give walls for privacy. A wooden table is to accompany each couch, to carry the lenses for cooling and focussing the sunshine.

There are three sittings for hospital patients every morning, each lasting an hour, and a quarter of an hour is allowed before each in which the patients are arranged and the necessary preparation of the skin made. A diseased area of skin is selected for treatment by Unna's method, which consists in pressing on the reddened skin with a glass spatula, that renders the comparatively healthy tissue anæmic and reveals any yellow lupoid nodules that may be present. The skin is cleansed with oil of sesame, and the diseased area is ringed with an aniline blue pencil. A piece of moistened lint with a hole in its centre corresponding with the size of the blue ring is then applied to the skin and the patient is ready to receive the concentrated light. A spot of light about the size of a sixpence is allowed to fall on the skin, so that a red ring is visible at the periphery when it is known that the more refrangible violet rays are focussed within it. Dark spectacles are used by the nurses while they keep the cooling lenses firmly pressed on these areas. After the area of skin selected for the day has received its hour's treatment a dressing of zinc carbonate and lanolin is applied, and the patient is allowed to leave. There is at the time no redness, or swelling, or pain—in short, no heat effect; but from six to twelve hours later redness and swelling set in, but without pain, a reaction which is more marked in the skin of the younger patients. Bullæ often form, and there is usually some serous weeping; but there is rarely pustulation, and never necrosis of tissue.

The account given in our contemporary is interesting, beyond its medical aspect, inasmuch as it shows how indispensable the services of skilled nurses have become in the scientific treatment of disease.

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