

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 756.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1902.

Vol. XXIX.

Editorial.

THE NURSING OF CHRONIC AND INCURABLE PATIENTS.

It was recently said to us by an invalid, who is quite helpless and dying slowly of an incurable and painful disease, "Nursing homes are very nice when one is acutely ill, but I do not think nurses care for the charge of chronic cases, they get so tired of one." It is surely a reproach to us as a profession when it is possible for a dying patient to make such a remark, and it is well that we should consider whether such a charge can be supported.

In discussing it, it must be borne in mind that at the present time the term "trained nurse" has no meaning, but includes all sorts and conditions of persons, from the woman who has had two months' training in a lying-in hospital to the highly-skilled nurse who holds the three years' certificate of a first-rate training-school. At the same time, until nurses have sufficient courage to insist upon the definition of a standard of training they must expect to be held responsible for the conduct and standards of the partially-trained.

But is it only the partially-trained who show their dislike for the care of chronic cases? We fear it cannot with truth be said that this is the case. Many well-qualified nurses seem to think the care of chronic patients an occupation unworthy of their talents and capacities, one which "anybody" can undertake.

But to the patient the case appears in a different light, and it is the chronically and incurably ill who are after all the most to be pitied. It is comparatively easy to bear any pain of limited duration, to make light of present ills when we can look forward to convalescence and recovery, but when the sufferer knows that not only must present pain be endured, but that it is permanent and progressive, he requires all the fortitude he can muster, and all the tenderness and care which can be given to him, to make his life as

comfortable as possible. To bring some brightness into the last days of a dying patient is a work which no nurse, however highly skilled, need disdain.

And how much there is to be done for this class of patients which only trained hands can do in the best way! The lifting, feeding, and general care of the helpless and incurable, if performed carelessly, unskillfully, or roughly, is a source of constant dread and pain, and the condition of a sick person who lies helpless in bed, with this prospect constantly before him, is pitiable indeed.

That there are nurses who consider the care of such patients a task unworthy of their talents and abilities is, we fear, too true. Accustomed only to the nursing of acute cases in hospital wards, they regard the care of the permanently ill as outside the scope of their work, forgetting that this includes the care of all sick persons, and that the chronic and incurable cases form a larger class than the acutely ill.

Nursing has been well defined as the service of the sick, and the true nurse will recognise that, wherever she can afford relief in suffering, her professional skill is being used to good advantage. But even the best professional skill is discounted if the patient feels that the nurse considers it somewhat a favour and condescension on her part to care for a merely chronic case. Combined with skilful nursing must be tenderness and kindness if the patient is to be really made happy and contented. To be dependent for the performance of every office on an unsympathetic attendant is little short of purgatory to a sensitive nature. It is, we believe, possible for a genuinely sympathetic nurse to convey to the patient by the touch of her hands her belief that it is a privilege, as well as a duty, to render any service which will alleviate suffering; and it is this knowledge more than all else beside which makes for the happiness of patients permanently dependent on the good offices of others.

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