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Editorial.

THE CARE OF PATIENTS AT NIGHT.

The fire on Sunday at the Isolation Hospital, Booker, near High Wycombe, directs attention to several important points connected with hospital management. The fire was first discovered by a nurse who was awakened by a crackling noise between four and five in the morning, and was horrified to see a portion of the building burning furiously. Another nurse, hastily dressing, proceeded at once to Wycombe on her bicycle, which is some two miles distant from the hospital, to summon the fire brigade. Meanwhile, the patients, five or six in number, the majority being children suffering from scarlet fever, were removed to a place of safety. The fire had taken a firm hold of the building before the fire brigade reached the spot and set energetically to work to subdue the flames. One of the blocks destroyed, most happily, was that set aside for small-pox patients, and was fortunately unoccupied. So far for the circumstances attending the fire.

The conflagration once more draws attention to the danger of a wooden building for hospital purposes, a danger which received appalling emphasis at the time of the Colney Hatch disaster. The accounts given of the present fire state that "as there were no fires in the buildings, and the whole place was perfectly safe when the nurses retired on Saturday night, it is supposed that the outbreak was due to an incendiary." But, presumably, if there were no fires, a building containing sick people was not left in total darkness all night long, so that lamps, gas, or electric light must have been in use.

The lessons to be learnt from the outbreak are, first, that while the hospital was built of inflammable materials, there were apparently no means on the spot of dealing with an outbreak of fire; secondly, assuming the fire to be the work of an incen-

diary, no one was on duty to keep guard over the buildings, and, therefore, if it is possible that anyone could conceive so dastardly a deed, it could be carried into execution without let or hindrance; and, most important of all, although the authorities of the hospital assumed the responsibility of the care of sick persons suffering from acute and dangerous illness requiring constant vigilance day and night, if chills and all their attendant and serious evils are to be avoided, yet we gather from the report there was no night nurse in the wards. Thus had not a member of the nursing staff been awakened by the noise of the burning building, and acted with all promptitude when once she realised the situation, the holocaust would have been complete. It is inconceivable that in these days the necessity for night, as well as day, nursing should require emphasis, yet this is evidently the case. It must, therefore, be pointed out that the sick remain so all the twenty-four hours round, that frequently in the night their condition is more serious than in the daytime, that, especially with children, bed-clothes may be thrown off, occasioning most serious consequences if the nurse is not there to replace them, driuks are needed, the condition of the patients must be noted, more especially in the early hours when the vitality is lowest—in short, that no public body should take the responsibility of the care of patients without making provision for this to be continuous, and, in our view, no nurse should accept office in an institution where a night service is not established, for all who are trained are aware that under other conditions the sick cannot be efficiently nursed.

Time was when it was thought that for a charwoman to sleep in the wards was all that was necessary; later, nurses who would not pass muster in the daytime were relegated to night duty. Now we know that this responsible work demands the best we have to give.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)