

## Teaching Materia Medica.

How to teach materia medica, how to make it interesting to the class, how to really get up any enthusiasm for the subject, is one of the problems of the young superintendent of a training-school. Teachers have worried over it, student nurses have agonised over it, and wrestled with it, and finally gave up the struggle and went to sleep with "materia medica" under their pillows. As a hypnotic materia medica is often more powerful in its effects than trional. But it has to be taught, and it has to be studied. How shall it be done? What can the teacher do to increase the interest in this subject?

In the first place, she must know the things that she would teach. It is not sufficient for her to pick up a text-book a half-hour before recitation time, and glance over the chief points in the lesson. There must be a definite plan for teaching the lesson in the teacher's mind. A lesson that lacks plan in the teacher's mind need never be expected to take definite shape or stick in the pupil's mind.

How much of materia medica should a nurse be expected to know in order to be an intelligent nurse? That question should be decided before the subject is undertaken. No doctor is expected to carry the facts about every drug in the pharmacopœia in his memory, much less a nurse. How much should she know? Not until that question is answered is the teacher ready to begin to teach materia medica.

Having decided how much the class should know and how much time can be devoted to it, the teacher is ready to plan for the classes. At least four months, taking one class weekly, should be devoted to the subject in the first year, preferably in the first six months. This means that the things a nurse should know about materia medica in her first year must be divided into sixteen sections. Each section should have a definite plan. The nurses should be encouraged to interleave their text-books and take copious notes, to underline, and use the margins freely in their studies. The portions of the text-book which contain the lesson to be studied should be pointed out, and the important points emphasised.

As an introduction to the study of materia medica an evening can very profitably be devoted to a discussion of remedial agents in general. In this general introductory talk the teacher might briefly touch on the therapeutic uses of heat, cold, light, air, electricity, rest cure, water, serums, transfusion, medical gymnastics, mechano-therapy, &c. None of them, of course, need be or could be treated thoroughly at that time, but it is well for a nurse to understand at the beginning of her course something of the great variety of remedial agents now in use besides medicines, and something of the conditions to which they

are applicable. The first lecture on materia medica proper might be devoted to definitions of pharmaceutical terms, and the sources from which drugs are obtained. The facts are, that "all nature, animate and inanimate, has been laid under contribution to provide remedies for the alleviation of disease." The animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms have all furnished of their products. Samples of crude drugs can be obtained from any manufacturing chemist and exhibited. Nurses are but children of a larger growth, and anything in the line of an object-lesson helps them to a clearer understanding. There are interesting facts connected with many of the drugs in common use that might be brought out that would add variety and interest to an otherwise dry lesson. How many student nurses know that the ergot which we use so commonly as an oxytocic and hæmostatic, is obtained from a parasitic fungus found on rye; that cascara sagrada is obtained from the bark of a tree; that belladonna, the drug so much used in eye work, that is used by all classes of practitioners, regular, homœopathic, eclectic, has heretofore been obtained almost entirely from England, Austria and Germany. It is now being very successfully cultivated in New Jersey, the seed being sown in the conservatories in February and the plants maturing late in September. Specimens of suppositories, pills, tablets, capsules, liquids, powders, ointments, showing the different forms in which drugs are administered will help to change a subject that at first sight appears hard and uninteresting to one that is, if not fascinating, at least bordering on it.

Another lesson should deal with chemical terms and abbreviations, weights and measures, approximate measures, graduated glasses and their uses. For this lesson a written test might be required.

Another lesson should deal very thoroughly with the French metric system, the approximate values of the old and new systems, dosage, plan of dosage, reasons for special times of administering doses, and elimination of drugs.

The lesson following might deal with the classification of drugs and chemicals, the principal cardiac stimulants and sedatives, their doses and physiological action. One lecture should be devoted to cathartics; another to tonics, stomachics, and digestants; another to nerve sedatives, anodynes, and hypnotics; another to antiseptics and disinfectants; another to diuretics and diaphoretics; and another to toxicology.

A whole evening can very profitably be devoted to a discussion of animal extracts and serums. The study of the methods of obtaining the various serums and animal extracts now on the market is unusually interesting. While the therapeutic value of many of the serums is disputed, and the subject is one on which there is certain to be a wide difference of opinion for years to come, yet the value of some has been proven beyond question. The serum

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