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Editorial.

THE QUALITY OF HOSPITAL CERTIFICATES.

The circumstances of the sad death of a nurse at the Poplar Hospital were recently made the subject of an inquiry at the Stepney Borough Coroner's Court, before Dr. E. King-Houchin, deputy-coroner. Several points which were brought out in the course of the evidence are of considerable interest from the nursing standpoint.

An aunt of the deceased nurse said that she had been in an overstrained and nervous condition for some time, and had complained of pains in the head. On the morning of her death the witness received a letter from her to say she had received her certificate, in which she also said "it is so awful, but I have forgotten all I have learnt."

In reply to the Coroner, the witness said she was aware that her niece had been depressed and unable to sleep. She had been very anxious to get through her training. She had also had some family troubles.

The Matron of the hospital in question stated that the nurse came to the hospital three years ago. Since last August she had been ailing and in a nervous condition and distressed in her mind. She was unable to sleep, and was given a sleeping draught the night before her death. The following morning she (the witness) was informed that the deceased had fallen out of a window in the top floor passage. She had never been known to walk in her sleep.

In reply to the Coroner, the witness said that lately the deceased had done very light duty to keep her mind employed, and although her certificate was not quite due, it had been granted to relieve her anxiety.

In directing the jury, the Coroner remarked on the painful nature of the case. It was perfectly clear the deceased was overwrought. It was for the jury to decide whether the case was one of suicide or accident, or they could leave the matter open. They took the last course.

It is frequently alleged that the public has every protection concerning the reliability of the nurses it employs if it will only take the trouble to ascertain that their training-schools vouch for their competence.

The unfortunate nurse at the Poplar Hospital who "met her death under circumstances which the evidence failed to prove," had evidently for the last three months shown symptoms of mental instability. That she may have been a good worker during her term of probation is not the point. Was she a woman whose mental condition was such as to justify her going out to the public with the certificate of the Poplar Hospital, which was certainly a guarantee that in the opinion of the authorities she was competent to nurse critical cases of illness amongst the sick public? Did the condition of the nurse's health justify the award to her of the hospital certificate? Surely not.

Another point is—was the nurse subjected to examination into her knowledge before the certificate which was not due was given to her to relieve her anxiety? It does not appear so, and certainly it would be undesirable to subject a woman in the condition of mind described to the anxiety of an examination into the knowledge which she herself alleged that she had lost. Is the public satisfied with a system which permits the award of certificates to nurses who have shown that the stress and strain of nursing life are more than they can bear mentally; or do they consider that it would be for their protection for the State to step in and require an independent test of a nurse's qualifications before she is guaranteed competent?

It is for the public to decide, as public opinion must eventually determine, whether the present conditions of certification (as evidenced in the case above referred to) afford them an adequate guarantee, or whether it is not in the common interest that an independent test should be established.

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