

Stray Thoughts on Operation Work.

To the nurse the advent of a new patient in an operation ward is a matter of every day occurrence. To the patient suddenly confronted with the necessity for a grave operation, and shrinking from the unknown, it is one of mental tension and suffering. The best nurse is one who realises this, and receives him with the consideration and sympathy which she herself would look for under similar circumstances. To some extent the atmosphere of the ward is helpful to the new arrival, who realises that his case is not an isolated one; here are many others, some who have undergone operations already, others waiting for them, and yet all are contented, cheerful, even happy. Nevertheless, though bearing his burden bravely, it is inevitable that he should dread the coming ordeal.

The preparation of a patient for operation is both general and special. The general preparation consists in securing the action of the organs of excretion—(1) the skin, for which reason, as well as for cleansing purposes, the patient, if allowed, is given a hot bath. If the doctor considers this inexpedient then he is washed all over in bed. (2) The bowels, by means of the aperient ordered, and usually by a soap and water enema on the morning of the operation. (3) The kidneys. The amount of urine passed should be noted, and any deviation from the normal as to quantity reported. A specimen must also be put up for examination. It is the duty of the nurse to see that the bladder is emptied immediately before an operation, an exception being cases of lithotripsy. In such cases the patient should be instructed not to pass urine for at least two hours before the operation. If by any inadvertence he should nevertheless do so, the nurse must not fail to report the occurrence.

The special preparation of the site of operation must be carried out in strict accordance with the instructions of the surgeon in charge of the case.

The diet of the patient is usually changed as little as possible on the days preceding an operation. On the day itself the last thing usually allowed is some strong beef tea about three or four hours previously.

It is well to remember that if a patient becomes violent on the table while partially under the influence of the anæsthetic he is easily controlled by holding the limbs *above* the joints. The arms *above* the elbows, the legs *above* the knees. Other methods will only result in the waste of much unnecessary

strength on the part of both patient and nurse.

The smoothness of an operation depends much not only upon the capacity, but also the serenity, of the Sister in Charge. It is for her to inspire her subordinates with the conviction that she knows what she is about, and that all will go well, that she will not fuss, neither must they. She must be all eyes, ears, hands, wits, and attention, and the secret of her success lies in thinking just ahead of the surgeon so that she may anticipate his wants. The moment when he asks for an article is the moment to produce it, not to fetch it. So the Sister must know by that sixth sense, bred of experience and foresight, when the anæsthetist needs more chloroform, and the surgeon a hot sponge, when the patient is likely to vomit, and the new probationer thinks she is going to faint. Under her expert direction everything proceeds so smoothly that a novice may be inclined to think waiting at an operation is an exceedingly easy matter. In reality, knowledge, alertness, and foresight are the foundations of success.

If a case does not progress satisfactorily, we should never content ourselves with thinking that all necessary precautions were taken, and this failure was for some reason inevitable. We should rather review in our own minds every detail for which we have been responsible in connection with it, and consider if, through any carelessness of our own, there was a broken link in the chain of precautions.

There are certain qualities which are necessary in every operation nurse, which should be noted and practised. The first of these is *cleanliness*, the foundation of which must be a liberal personal use of soap and water. The special preparation of hands and arms is a necessity, but equally important is the daily bath. *Painstaking*, and a minute attention to detail, essential in all nursing, and, indeed, in work of any kind of a high standard, is especially important in operation work. *Conscientiousness* is indispensable, for the life of the patient may depend upon it. The neglect of some apparent trifle by an unconscientious nurse may ruin the most carefully thought out plan of the most brilliant surgeon. *Thoroughness*, a lack of which generally has its root in laziness. *Observation*, a habit which is much more developed naturally in some persons than others, but which may be cultivated. *Forethought*, which to be effective, must be based on knowledge. *Quietness*, for a noisy, bustling nurse is quite out of place at an operation. *Accuracy*, as, for instance, in the measuring of lotions, hypodermic injections, etc., and last, but not least, *method*. There must be no deviation from the rule—a place for everything and everything in its place. M.B.

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