

The School Nurse.

HER WORK AMONG THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS

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The systematic medical inspection of elementary school-children, which has resulted from the 1907 Act, opens up a new field to the nursing profession, and it is certain that the service will require a type of nurse adequately trained and possessing in a marked degree the characteristics of tact and keen observation.

I propose in this article firstly to give an outline of the duties of the school nurse, indicating the methods by which those duties may be most efficiently carried out; and, secondly, to mention the kind of training and experience, and the personal characteristics, which will make a nurse most suitable for the post in question. For convenience sake, the work of the school nurse may be considered in three divisions—firstly, the attendance at the school during the examination of the children by the medical officer; secondly, clerical work; and, thirdly, the “following up” of the cases when the parents have been notified of any defect or ailment in the child. This last-mentioned part of the work is undoubtedly the most important duty of the school nurse, and involves the visiting of the child’s home, and the giving of tactful advice to the parents concerning the child’s condition. Under the present system, the parent of a child who needs medical attention is notified of the fact by the examining school medical officer and advised to obtain treatment from the general practitioner or at a voluntary hospital. The personal interview of the nurse with the parent is valuable, because much may be done to persuade a parent to have the child attended to, and I believe that the success of the present system of inspection will depend to a great extent on the way in which these ailing cases are followed up. From this belief arises my opinion that the service will require a type of nurse well endowed with the characteristics mentioned. During the actual examination at the school the nurse will prepare each child by helping to loosen the clothing as much as is necessary for the examination, and in most cases she will do the preliminary testing of vision by

means of the Snellen type. The faculty of keen observation, which is necessary in all her duties, is in this part particularly valuable, and in passing on the child to the medical officer, the nurse should call his attention to any defect she may have noticed, and particularly should a careful observation be made of such conditions as ringworm. And it is important for the nurse to remember that her presence is necessary also for reasons other than her utility in the actual examination, and, bearing this in mind, she can do much to put at ease such of the older girl scholars of 14 or 15 years of age as are inclined to be nervous and to regard the medical examination with dislike.

It will be the nurse’s duty also to make the preliminary arrangements in each school before the arrival of the examining medical officer, and, in doing so, every consideration should be given to the feelings of the teaching staff of the school. All arrangements should be made with the least possible inconvenience to the teachers compatible with an efficient examination, and the routine work of the school should be disturbed to but a minor extent; and it will be found that the exercise of discretion will result in almost every case in the willing help and co-operation of the teaching staff.

CLERICAL WORK.

The amount of clerical work which the school nurse undertakes will vary under different education authorities. In most boroughs of about 50,000 inhabitants, the writing work takes about half an hour a day, and consists chiefly in the addressing and filling in of the notifications to the parents concerning the children who need medical attention; but under many education authorities this part of the work is reduced to nil by the provision of a junior clerk, and it is probable that when the Act is in proper working order such a clerk will be provided in all cases.

VISITING OF THE HOMES.

In dealing with the important duty of following up the notified cases, it may be well to refer to instances in which the good work of the nurse will bring about a high standard of efficiency in the service. Soon after the examination of the children in any one school, notifications are sent, as before stated, to the parents of all the children who need medical attention, informing them of the fact, and advising them to obtain treatment; and after an interval of a few weeks the school nurse visits the homes of such children to inquire what has been done in the way of obtaining medical treatment. In only a few instances does an

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