

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

SHOW HOW A NURSE MAY BE A "CARRIER" OF INFECTION FROM ONE PATIENT TO ANOTHER.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Ada Calvert Jones, Nurses' Home, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, E.C.

PRIZE PAPER.

A nurse may naturally be a medium through which a disease may be carried from one patient to another, although, if she is conscientious and careful in every detail, this should rarely occur.

In modern times not nearly so many cases are isolated from the general wards as they were only a few years ago. Such infectious diseases as enteric, whooping-cough, measles, and mumps are now nursed in the ordinary wards of the hospital if they are developed there, by the same nurses, without, as a rule, a second case occurring.

An infectious disease is due to a micro-organism of one group or another, and this germ will be present in one or all the discharges from the patient. All china used by him will be specially marked and kept apart, with a suitable cloth for cleansing purposes. A bedpan or vomit-bowl will be covered immediately after use and removed. Any soiled clothing will be placed in a bucket or bowl, carried from the ward or room, and disinfected.

It is by neglecting to do these things that the disease is carried from one patient to another. A nurse prevents the spread of infection chiefly by her "surgical cleanliness." She is neat and clean in person in the first place. Secondly, there is the all-important item of the hands, which are the literal "carriers." These must be thoroughly washed, scrubbed, and disinfected every time anything, however trivial, is done for the patient. Neglect of this small duty means running the grave risk of giving the offending germ to the next patient. To draw the sheet of a patient suffering with enteric, or wipe the nose of a child who has measles, and then give the patient in the next bed, who keeps asking for a drink, what she craves for, without first scrubbing up, would give her every chance of contracting the disease.

In cases like scarlet fever and cerebro-spinal meningitis, which are believed to be due to an ultra-microscopic organism, the one found in the respiratory tract and the other in the upper pharynx, the nurse should be specially careful. She herself may, and generally does, lodge

several of the germs in her own throat. These get there by what is known as mouth spray from the patient. In this way she may carry it on to someone else unless she takes the precaution of gargling with some disinfectant.

In private nursing the same care is necessary. The patient is isolated, and everything kept apart that he uses. A sheet which has been wrung out in some disinfectant is usually hung in front of the door, so that the germ-laden dust is not allowed to go beyond it.

It follows, therefore, that the nurse, if she is careless in the smallest detail, can be a very real danger to all with whom she may come in contact. She should remember, when nursing an infectious case of any kind, that she owes a duty to her patient, the public, and herself.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss A. Wharton, Miss F. Shepard, Mr. J. Buckingham, R.A.M.C., Miss A. K. Berham, Miss Clara Blackburn, Miss T. Robinson, Miss Dora Vine, Miss M. Maberly.

Miss A. Wharton writes:—"The nurse should wear a gown, and a cap to cover the hair. On no account should a nurse give toys or books to one patient which have been used by another. All rags should be burnt. When nursing a case of enteric fever the nurse should never touch her food with her hands; even bread-and-butter should be eaten with a knife and fork, and never taken inside the ward, otherwise she may carry infection indirectly."

Mr. J. Buckingham, R.A.M.C., says that a nurse may spread infection, amongst other ways, by allowing visitors to go into the ward without wearing a cloak, and by not seeing they wash their hands before leaving the ward. A nurse may spread infection by not being extremely careful to keep towels, combs, brushes, books, and toys separate. Also by not burning all refuse after sweeping the ward floor, and by allowing patients to pass articles to one another; by not keeping patients' isolation cloaks separate, so that they are not mixed with others; by not being extremely careful in nursing such cases to guard against the spread of infection by destroying the germs which leave the patient's body in the breath, discharges, and excretions, and are able to start the disease afresh in another individual. It is the duty of every nurse to guard against infection by all reasonable precautions. She should never go on duty fasting. As much fresh air as possible should be obtained, and no food should be eaten in the wards.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What are colds?

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