

THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF NURSES.

SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL.

A special meeting of the Council was held at 19, Queen's Gate, S.W.7, on January 22nd, 1942, at which important business was transacted. The President, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, S.R.N., was in the Chair.

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE REGISTERED NURSE.

A meeting of the above Committee was held at 19, Queen's Gate, S.W.7, on January 22nd, at 2.30 p.m. Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., S.R.N., Vice-President, presided.

The Minutes were read and confirmed, and correspondence reported. Several members were unable to attend owing to illness, amongst them Miss G. M. Hardy, S.R.N. The Chairman, therefore, read her Report on personal visits to institutions for the care of the chronic sick, as follows:

THE CARE OF THE CHRONIC SICK.

By Miss G. M. HARDY.

I recently received a kind invitation to visit one or two Institutions for the Chronic Sick where Assistant Nurses are trained. I gladly accepted, and on Thursday, January 8th, I found myself speeding along the country lanes in the Supervisor's car to one large hospital of this type.

On the way there I learned how deeply interested my companion was in the welfare of the chronic sick and aged people, and how determined she was to do all in her power to get those old folk the best nursing skill available, even if it meant recognising a second grade of nurse and awarding them legal status.

I learned that but few State Registered Nurses will accept posts in these hospitals, and as these are not Recognised Training Schools they cannot attract girls for training as registered nurses. In the opinion of my companion, the only alternative was to recruit a certain class of girl; give her two years' simplified training, at the end of which time the candidate sits for an examination, receives a certificate if successful, and then should be enrolled on a separate register under the control and management of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

I also learned that in the not far distant past, Nursing Co-operations had been approached to send out to these hospitals assistant nurses, and that unscrupulous Co-operations, taking advantage of the acute shortage of staff, had sent out women at high fees who did not even have an elementary knowledge of nursing and who perhaps had not one day's Hospital experience to their credit, and who had not the slightest interest in or sympathy for the poor sick old people, and these women had in some cases treated them abominably.

I was informed that some hospital buildings are antiquated and totally lacking in facilities and equipment for nursing sick people of any type. In one hospital of three storeys—there is *no lift*—nurses have to mount *ladders* to get up to the patients on the third floor, and all meals and other essentials are carried up and down these ladders, and this—in the year of Grace 1942 (or disgrace!).

The two hospitals which I visited, however, were not so grim and forbidding as I had expected. They were buried in the heart of the country, miles away from civilisation, and if the bus service is not too regular, visits to cinemas, libraries, churches, etc., must be few and far between.

On arrival at the hospital we were met by Matron, who was most charming to us, and our tour commenced in the female ward containing completely bedridden old ladies. I was at once struck by the cleanliness, orderliness and professional aspect of the ward. The beds were beautifully

made, although rather too close together, and the patient themselves looked very comfortable indeed. Matron remarked to us that not one patient had had a bed sore or red back, and some of these patients have been in bed for 12 years!! Except for the type of patient, I might have been touring a well-managed medical ward of a general training school. Each old lady to whom I spoke assured me that she was happy and well cared for and they had no complaints. The sanitary annexes were quite good and perfectly clean and in good order. There was a grave shortage of nursing staff.

A Sad Sight.

What of the patients? To me they were a most depressing sight, and I felt sad and uncomfortable. The skin of their faces and hands was very wrinkled, very yellow and dry. I felt that they never saw the sun: their eyes were lustreless and dim, and their expressions mask-like. They were merely existing—or vegetating, and utterly resigned to their state. I saw no balconies on to which they could be wheeled in summer, so probably they never saw the trees and the sky, excepting through the window, nor heard the birds sing. They had nothing beautiful on which to gaze; just bare, long ward walls and endless rows of white-covered beds. They wore no pretty nighties or coloured bed-jackets, and no jaunty gay bows of ribbon adorned their hair!!

All was drab, hopelessly drab, and I felt they were imprisoned or doomed. I felt relieved to get out of the door, and as I left a chaplain entered. I wondered . . .

Next we saw the old people who were not confined to bed. The same cleanliness, orderliness and beautifully made beds arranged in two long rows were apparent, as were also the same indifference to surroundings, the same resignation and apathy. The inmates were sitting bolt upright on straight-backed wooden chairs, utterly devoid of the ease and comfort which their age and condition demand. They were draped in ugly, shapeless navy blue cotton frocks with a navy blue sleeveless jersey over them, sitting staring into space—vegetating, despairing!

At another institution several miles away I saw again the overcrowded wards—sick and old helpless men and women lacking all but the bare essentials in comfort, sympathy and nursing skill, tucked away in the country, out of sight, so that the consciences of the State and culpable societies are left undisturbed and quiet! Not sufficient nurses, barely sufficient willing hands of any description, yet only a few care sufficiently to protest and wrack their brains for schemes to right this injustice!

Assistant Nurses.

It was at this second institution that I talked to a group of girls who are taking the course for assistant nurses sponsored by the Public Authority. Their ages ranged from 18 to 27 years, and they appeared to me to be a type of candidate one often meets in general training schools. I spoke to each in turn and asked them why they were not taking the ordinary syllabus approved by the General Nursing Council for State Registration. Their excuses were chiefly "that they did not think they would have passed their examinations," or "they were going to be married and did not wish to become State Registered Nurses," and such reasons. Their Matron assured me that the training had vastly improved them, and that many of them would proceed to general training and quite a few of the remainder would be married. Only a tiny percentage of them would remain to do the job for which they were being trained. So it looks as if this scheme will not be successful in finding anything like the number of people who are required to attend to the chronic sick.

As a result of my visit, and after much thought and

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