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Editorial.

A Burning Question

Age of Entry to Nursing Training.

IN AUGUST OF THIS YEAR there comes into force the new age-limit set by the General Nursing Council, for Students who wish to take up Nursing as a career. From then onwards, except in special exempted cases, all women must be eighteen years old before commencing their training for State Registration.

This arbitrary ruling is causing much heartburning and anxiety amongst senior members of our profession who are responsible for the nursing of the patients in hospitals and for the training of Student Nurses. Why—may we ask in all humility—has the age-limit been set for eighteen—instead of, say, seventeen or thirty-two?

In opening this argument we must admit straight away that we believe the General Nursing Council has acted in good faith and in what they feel to be the best interests of Student Nurses. Perhaps the Council Members are under the impression that a female is not a woman until she is eighteen years old, and that prior to this age—the strain of training is too much for the Student?

If this is the case, then might not the Council be mistaken in thus under-estimating the physical propensities of young women? It is surely common knowledge that at *fifteen* years of age a female is no longer a child, and according to a well-known woman author (Francis Parkington Keyes) a young woman of fifteen is "capable of coping with the complete experience of love and with the ordeal of maternity, which, in the flesh, represents her supreme fulfilment."

If this is so, then could not a young woman of fifteen—as far as her physical powers are concerned—cope with Nurse-training? Would this be any more detrimental to her health than coping with maternity? If therefore—this is possible at fifteen—surely it is even more so at seventeen years of age? Why then the edict that a woman must wait until she is eighteen before commencing her training? This unnecessary time-lag can only have dire results in our hospitals and will give great joy to other professions and trades who are seeking aspirants to their ranks.

It may be all very well for high-minded Council Members (many of whom are not Matrons of training Schools) to sit around a council table and formulate rules and regulations about the age of young Student Nurses, and put them off for as long as possible before allowing them to commence their training. Such a practice would restrict aspirants to the profession in a

golden age where young women would be plentiful and our powers of selection at their zenith. But to restrict them in these modern days, when their services are priceless and eagerly sought for by competitive professions and trades; in these days of family limitations and high cost of living, where every penny earned is essential to the family budget; is surely madness and suicidal, and can only increase the desperate and heart-breaking shortage of student and trained Nurses.

Many young women of fifteen years old, after leaving school, must work for their living. Many are working far harder and under less beneficial conditions than obtain in our Nurse-training Schools, with their 48-hour week and one month's holiday with pay, and where the Student's health is cared for and cherished by medical experts, assisted by the latest protective measures known to medical science.

It is also well-known that numbers of young women of fifteen years enter the profession as Nursing Cadets. As such, they are educated in professional and general subjects, and the two years spent in this way, learning such subjects, will ease their approach to the more technical training at a later stage. It should also be remembered that once girls of fifteen get into industry they begin planning their social activities and their young lives generally. They make important friends and thus by the time they are seventeen it is very difficult to get them to make a change—especially to a career such as nursing.

In abnormal times (and who will question the fact that these are abnormal times?) many altruistic measures must give way to emergency measures. The General Nursing Council ought to move with the times and discard arbitrary regulations designed for times of plenty and ease. In these drastic days we must train MORE Nurses for future commitments, and there should be no fixed age for entry to training. Let all young women of any reasonable age whatsoever be trained as Nurses, provided they enjoy good health, and have intelligence and common sense and the urge to nurse the sick.

Should young women be allowed to start nursing at a very young age their duties ought to be regulated to their mental and physical capacities. They could be encouraged to commence training in hospitals for sick children, or in eye hospitals. Similarly an easier approach is found in orthopaedic hospitals and those hospitals specialising in the nursing of infectious diseases. In some smaller hospitals giving a full general training, the pace is not too difficult. So let us extend a welcome to intelligent young women who intend to make a CAREER OF NURSING as early as seventeen years if they feel ready for the work. G. M. H.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)