

International Council of Nurses

Report of the Executive Secretary to
the Tenth Quadrennial Congress

Monday, July 13th, 1953, 9 a.m. Business Session.

MADAM PRESIDENT, FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS—

Before presenting a Report for the years 1949 to 1953 of the activities of the International Council of Nurses, it may be of interest to the distinguished audience here assembled to remind them that the I.C.N. is now in its fifty-fourth year, that its Headquarters has been since 1947 in London, England, that the Brazilian Graduate Nurses' Association (which is one of 30 National Nurses' Associations in Full Membership) became affiliated to the I.C.N. in 1929, and that in individual members, the I.C.N. numbers some four hundred thousand nurses.

I am conscious that this being the first I.C.N. Congress to be held in Brazil, the first in fact, in the southern part of the American Continent, it is therefore the first occasion on which an Executive Secretary of the I.C.N. has addressed an audience in South America of such size and composed of so many different nationalities. It is not, however, the first time I have addressed an audience of Brazilian nurses in their own country, for the Brazilian Graduate Nurses' Association did me the honour of inviting me to attend their Fourth National Congress in December, 1950. Twice during the early part of 1950, the invitation to visit Brazil was received at I.C.N. Headquarters. Twice it was necessary for me to reply that our funds for travel during 1950 were already either expended or allocated, leaving nothing in reserve for me to undertake the long journey. Two weeks before the date of the opening of the Fourth National Congress, however, the following cable was received at I.C.N. Headquarters:—

"Your passage is paid. Make your reservation."

Signed, President Brazilian Graduate Nurses' Association. This evidence of determination and enterprise on the part of Brazilian nurses, and also the warmth of the welcome and generous hospitality accorded to me during my three weeks' stay in this country, have remained a constant memory and an incentive in my own work; and have also given me a better understanding of problems, similar to those in this country, facing National Nurses' Associations in other parts of the world.

It can be said with truth therefore, that no Association which is affiliated with other Associations in our world-wide and long established Federation—the International Council of Nurses—can exist in isolation. All of us, because of this international relationship, are in a position to help and to influence each other to a greater or lesser degree. The early struggles, the determined progress and subsequent achievements of National Nurses' Associations, and the method used in bringing these achievements to fruition, can act as a valuable guide and stimulus to Associations in other parts of the world; and if I may here quote the motto of an old-established and respected school for girls in England—a motto which could well be adopted by our own profession—"The Merit of one is the Honour of all."

The years during which most of us have been practising the profession of nursing are probably some of the most ominous in the history of the profession. Ominous, not only because of the things which have been done and which are already past history, but also because of the legacy we have inherited, and for which future generations of nurses will hold us responsible. The first half of the twentieth century has been an era of discovery and of rich accomplishment in medicine, in surgery, in anaesthesia, in anti-biotics, all of which has affected our patients and revolutionised their treatments. Nursing has not stood apart from these momentous happen-

ings, but through legislation, through better educational opportunities both basic and advanced, through an attempt to standardise what are acceptable criteria for the best nursing service in all fields, through the exchange and interchange of nurses between countries so that they may benefit from each other's knowledge and experience—in all these directions nurses have thus contributed towards the march of science. They have taken steps to ensure that their own professional work and the care of their patients for which they are intimately responsible, are in line with the latest trends and advances in medicine.

It is the responsibility of the I.C.N., which has been described as a "fact-finding, standard-making, co-ordinating body," to see that these desirable objectives are achieved and to do so through the strengthening of professional organisation in all countries.

When some 3,500 nurses met together in 1949 in Stockholm, Sweden, it was on the occasion of the I.C.N. Fiftieth Anniversary Conference. We were in fact celebrating the first 50 years of international professional organisation for nurses, for the International Council of Nurses had been founded 50 years before, in 1899. The history of the four years which have passed since 1949 are therefore especially worthy of careful study, for they will have "set the stage" for events which are likely to occupy ourselves and our successors during the second half of this great century, and should indicate the direction in which we as a profession are travelling.

The principal objectives of the I.C.N. have remained unchanged throughout its long history. As I see them, they are quite simply, to help in maintaining the highest standards of nursing service, and of nursing education in preparation for service, in those countries which are in membership with us; and to help those countries not yet in membership or desirous of joining us, to achieve or to maintain these same standards. In the constant pursuit of these objectives, the principal activities to which I.C.N. Headquarters has devoted itself during the past four years, can be appropriately described under the following five headings:—

1. Information Centre.
2. Travel of Executive Staff.
3. Committee Activities.
4. Displaced Persons (Nurses) Professional Register.
5. International Relationships.

To deal briefly with each of the above:—

1. Information Centre.

The claim of the I.C.N. to be a centre of information or of advice on international nursing affairs is increasingly put to the test through correspondence, by personal visits from individual nurses to I.C.N. Headquarters, or visits by I.C.N. Officers or Staff to countries or to regions or to attend international conferences. Requests for information or for assistance are varied and numerous and cover every aspect of nursing. They may be concerned with the building up of a better nursing service; with the revision of curricula; with the drawing up of statutes for a professional association or the drafting of a new nursing law. From I.C.N. Headquarters we are in correspondence with the National Nurses' Associations, with National Associate Representatives or with individual nurses in more than 50 countries, as well as with other national or international organisations in areas of work related to our own. To provide the service which is rightly demanded of us, and justify the confidence placed in us, it is essential that from Headquarters we work in closest co-operation with our own Member Associations and try to keep ourselves as well informed as possible on new trends and developments in nursing and allied fields of work. Only in this way can we anticipate future events and try to the best of our ability to meet them.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)