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Editorial.

Why All is Not Well in the Hospital Services.

A REPORT, CRITICISING SOME METHODS in hospital routine which are the practice in many hospitals at the present time, and strongly recommending reforms and suggestions for hospital patients, was recently submitted by the Central Health Services Council to Mr. MacLeod, Minister of Health, and given wide publicity in the daily press.

The Report clearly reveals that all is not well in the Hospital Services, but we are of the opinion that the root cause of the unsatisfactory conditions goes much deeper than the shortcomings enumerated in the Report of the Council. Of these, in their deliberation, the Council stressed their conviction that—too early waking and washing of patients before 6 o'clock in the morning, provoked the most general and strongest complaints, and that to rectify this "some tasks traditionally performed before the Doctors' rounds should be done during or after them."

The introduction of advised reforms—extended visiting hours to allow patients' relatives and friends to visit them daily, and the elimination of noise to a minimum—have for some time been adopted in some hospitals.

That ward furnishings should be bright with flowers and pictures has, since the founding of Modern Nursing by Florence Nightingale, been a cult of ward management.

In the recommendation that there should be a "wide choice of food"—always a difficult problem and one of the most vulnerable to economic ventures—the quotation that "the devil sends the cook" is undeserved, as the supplies are often of such poor quality, that "he" might easily have sent the food.

"Theirs Not to Reason Why."

The admonition of the Central Health Services Council that Medical and Nursing Staff and administrators should not maintain the attitude that patients "were merely cases" and "Theirs not to reason why," we understand refers to a long standing matter of medical etiquette, and is therefore a purely medical concern. We would, however, respectfully point out that this attitude of reticence, so markedly evident since the nationalisation of the Health Service, creates for patients an atmosphere of cold indifference and a sense of frustration in their need for sympathy and understanding of their condition. A patient was heard to

remark after her experience in a first class general hospital: "I wondered if it was thought I was ill?"

Proposed Reception of Patients by a Lay Employee.

The proposal of the Central Health Services Council, that "patients should be received first by a lay employee with a sympathetic personality," would mean the creation of a new appointment, which is somewhat surprising at a time when the National Health Service is lamentably short of money and short of staff. We wonder how many receptionists and assistant receptionists would be required for a hospital of 600 beds? It is not, however, at all surprising that in the Council's conception of a new hospital post of importance that the Nursing Profession should be entirely ignored! It is this attitude towards Nurses that is the root of the shortcomings in hospital management in the nursing of the sick, and the determined whittling away of the Matron's authority in her department. In her struggle to maintain a high standard of training, despite an age of indiscipline and lack of vocational urge, she has been the victim of an insidious campaign purporting to lay the blame for the shortage of Nurses on hospital Matrons and Sisters.

On this matter we recall, when in December, 1948, the British College of Nurses, Ltd., communicated with the then Minister of Health, the Right Hon. Aneurin Bevan, strongly protesting against Lord Crook's unjustifiable indictment in the House of Commons that "the shortage would continue while there were Matrons and Ward Sisters who passed on hard strict rules," this misleading and unjust censure, moved Lord Shepherd to promise a new authority to organise the training of Nurses!

Such undermining of the professional status of these officers, where a certain amount of discipline must be enforced for the smooth conduct of the hospital, we have reason to believe still exists, as instanced lately when a Matron, after explaining to a Nurse what she must not do, was criticised by her lay Committee.

If these officers combine, before it is too late, to assert their authority in their official duties, justice could not deny them their position, although we realise that the effort would demand that greatest of all attributes—Courage!

Surely there is, in the present chaotic state of nursing affairs, a clear call for united action to retrieve the now vanishing Nursing ethics and the true spirit of practical nursing which once made the Nursing Profession so great. This urgent reform would bring once again to suffering humanity the priceless service and comfort for which it seeks and longs.

A. S. B.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)