

National Health Service.

The Nursing of Infectious Diseases.

THE MINISTER'S ATTENTION has been drawn to the difficulties experienced by the management committees of many infectious diseases hospitals owing to the diminishing number of entrants for training as fever nurses and it has been represented to him that these difficulties may be largely due to uncertainty about the continuance of the Fever Nurses Register of the General Nursing Council. The matter has been discussed with the General Nursing Council, and now, in agreement with the Council, the Minister offers the following explanation of the situation, and advice on the best methods of ensuring an adequate and efficient nursing service in this special field.

The Nurses Registration Act, 1919, required the General Nursing Council to keep the Register of nurses in a number of parts including a general part and certain specified supplementary parts appropriate to special branches of nursing and authorised the Council to establish, by their Rules, additional supplementary parts. The Council in due course made Rules establishing a part of the Register for "nurses trained in the nursing of persons suffering from infectious diseases," to be known as "registered fever nurses," and prescribed a course of training extending over a period of two years (or one year for nurses already registered in any other part).

The Nurses Act, 1949 (section 11), empowered the Minister to make an order closing any supplementary part of the Register if requested to do so by the Council, and it has been generally assumed that this power would in due course be exercised when schemes of comprehensive training became well established. So far the development of comprehensive schemes of training has not proceeded beyond the stage of tentative experiment and no steps have accordingly yet been taken to close any supplementary part of the Register.

It has however been represented to the Minister by the General Nursing Council that the training of nurses for the Fever Nurses Register is often unsatisfactory, by reason of the low average rate of occupancy of infectious diseases beds and a consequent dearth of clinical material for training purposes; also that the small size of many of the training schools resulted in uneconomic use of the services of sister tutors. It was the Council's view that admissions to the Fever Nurses Register might well be discontinued without detriment to the service, provided that suitable infectious diseases hospitals were included in group schemes of training for the general part of the Register, thus providing adequate experience in fever nursing for a substantial proportion of student nurses in general training and for special experience for those nurses who will later fill senior posts in special hospitals or units for infectious diseases.

It is clear that this view is widely shared, and since the appointed day many infectious diseases hospitals have in fact discontinued training for the Fever Nurses Register and taken their place in group schemes of training for the general part of the Register. On the other hand it is known to be the view of many who are closely concerned with the administration of the infectious diseases hospitals that an efficient service depends in large measure on the employment of an adequate number of nurses specially trained in the nursing of infectious diseases, whether patients suffering from these diseases are admitted to special hospitals or to special sections of general hospitals and that such training can be ensured only by the continuance of the Fever Nurses Register.

The Minister has now fully considered the matter in the light of the views expressed, and has come to the conclusion that it would not be wise at this juncture to make an order closing the Fever Nurses Register. The obligation of the Council to maintain that Register and to provide for admissions to it will accordingly remain in force for the time being.

The Minister has, however, much sympathy with the views that have been expressed to him by the General Nursing Council on this subject and is of opinion that, in the interests of the efficiency of the service, certain measures should now be pursued by the management committees of the infectious diseases hospitals, in order to counteract the deficiencies of the present system. These measures are set out in the following paragraphs.

Training for the Fever Nurses Register can be efficiently carried out only in units which can provide adequate clinical material and experience and can attract enough students to form classes of a reasonable size. These conditions are satisfied only in a relatively small number of infectious diseases hospitals, generally in large centres of population. It is accordingly the Minister's view that training for the Fever Nurses Register should be concentrated in these larger units, and that the smaller infectious diseases units should abandon the attempt to provide this training.

Many small infectious diseases hospitals will no doubt be reluctant to give up training because of the fear of resultant staffing difficulties. Such hospitals are advised to take one or other of the following courses:—

- (a) to seek to become part of a group training school training nurses for the general Register;
- (b) to seek approval as training schools for assistant nurses in association with other suitable hospitals;
- (c) to form their nursing establishment on the basis of a nucleus of registered fever nurses assisted by enrolled assistant nurses and/or nursing auxiliaries.

The needs of the infectious diseases hospitals for specially trained nursing staff can, in the Minister's view, be best met by general trained nurses who have had the requisite additional training and experience in fever nursing. Such nurses can be admitted to the Fever Nurses Register after one year's post-registration training in an approved Fever Nurses training school. The management committees of the hospitals which continue to train for the Fever Nurses Register are accordingly strongly advised to endeavour to attract general trained nurses to take the special training and to give such applicants preference over untrained applicants seeking to take the two-year course.

The General Nursing Council has approved the institution of a number of experimental courses of training for the Fever Nurses Register whereby general trained nurses are enabled to qualify for admission to that Register after nine months' post-registration training, provided that three months of the general nursing course have been spent in the hospital in which the infectious diseases training is taken, under a scheme approved by the Council for this purpose, and the Minister understands that the Council would be prepared to consider applications for the approval of more such courses in suitable group training schemes. They would also be willing to consider applications for the institution of experimental courses designed to provide an integrated training for admission to both the general and infectious diseases parts of the Register in suitable general and infectious diseases hospitals.

Study Tour in Denmark and Sweden.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has received an invitation jointly from the Danish Council of Nurses and the Nurses' Association of Sweden for a group of 20 members of our National Council of Nurses to attend a fortnight's Study Tour to be held in Denmark and Sweden from June 8th to 22nd of this year.

The first week will be spent in Sweden and the party will then proceed to Denmark.

An interesting programme has been arranged which includes as subjects, Tuberculosis and Geriatrics, and some interesting

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