

## Some Thoughts upon Operation Work.

It is beyond the scope of a paper of the limits of the present one to do more than lay down certain broad principles, and to reiterate elementary facts, in connection with this branch of nursing; but inasmuch as things which appear to be self-evident, to those to whom use has become second nature, are, nevertheless, a source of real difficulty and bewilderment to the novice, I venture to hope that a few notes dealing with the A B C of this department may not be useless to beginners.

First of all we must consider the necessary qualifications for the operation Nurse. Of these some of the most important are cleanliness, painstaking, conscientiousness, thoroughness, observation, forethought, method, quietness, quickness, accuracy.

*Cleanliness.*—Absolute, strict surgical cleanliness, and, above all things, a plentiful use of soap and water. No use of antiseptics will make up for neglect in this particular. An obstetric physician of my acquaintance, and one of the most scrupulously antiseptic of men, constantly asserts that the use of antiseptics is necessary only because people are, as a rule, *dirty*. That in our present condition of enlightenment we cannot dispense with them, but that when we have attained to absolute cleanliness their use will be no longer necessary. Be this as it may, we cannot at present do without them; therefore, though we may head our list of antiseptic agents with soap and water, it is necessary, in order to attain to surgical cleanliness (in addition to the daily bath and frequent change of underlinen), immediately before an operation, to cleanse the hands and arms, and brush the nails thoroughly with soap and water, and then to immerse them in an antiseptic solution—preferably perchloride of mercury, 1 in 2,000—but only if the washing with soap and water has been thoroughly done will the use of the antiseptic be of value, for the natural skin is greasy, and, unless the grease in it has been removed by the action of soap and water, the antiseptic agent used will be unable to penetrate it.

*Painstaking.*—All work, to be well done, entails an expenditure of care and pains in the doing of it, and especially is this the case in work connected with nursing. Indeed, unless we are prepared to devote ourselves to the interests of our profession, and to make many sacrifices at its shrine, we have certainly mistaken our vocation. The reason, I believe, why so many of us never arrive at a level beyond that of mediocrity, is because we are content with a

low standard, and because we are too inert to be willing to take the necessary trouble to attain to a high one. It is an invaluable practice to habitually cultivate a habit of dissatisfaction with our present attainments, and only so shall we ever attain to anything approaching perfection. Our ideals, indeed, seem to partake of the nature of the will-o'-the-wisp—the more nearly we approach them the further they recede from us—but the habit of aiming high cannot be too sedulously cultivated, and this necessitates infinite painstaking and minute attention to details.

*Conscientiousness.*—This again is a necessity. However brilliant a woman may be, if she is unconscientious she is unsuitable as a Nurse, and this holds good in an especial degree as regards operation work. The unconscientious person may be quick and smart, and showy, but she slurs over or neglects many important trifles, upon the conscientious performance of which the success of an operation and the very life of the patient often depend. If an operation case does not progress satisfactorily, or become septic, we should never content ourselves with thinking that all necessary precautions were taken, and that this failure was for some reason inevitable. We should rather review in our own minds every detail for which we have been responsible in connection with it, and think if through any carelessness of our own there was a weak or broken link in the chain of precautions taken, so rendering them futile.

This brings us to another point—*Thoroughness*. Unless we are prepared to carry thoroughness into every detail of operation work it is useless our attempting it. The lack of thoroughness, as also of cleanliness, is generally due to laziness. I believe there are very few of us who are not naturally lazy, and we need to be constantly pulling up on this point. Certainly the most energetic and the most uncompromisingly industrious people almost invariably own to a natural tendency to this failing.

*Observation* is another important qualification. Some people are naturally much more observant than others, but a habit of observation is in a great measure the result of cultivation. If we always count it a reproach when someone else has noticed a thing which we have not observed, and resolve that another occasion shall not find us wanting, we shall make real progress in the cultivation of this habit.

*Forethought.*—This is essential to a good operation Nurse. It may be pardonable for amateurs to exhibit a good-natured willingness to scuffle when a surgeon makes a sudden demand, but it is a very serious fault in a Nurse, who should be able to anticipate what is likely to be wanted, and have it ready to hand. The

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