

Hours of Hospital Nurses.

THE length of hours during which Hospital Nurses should be expected to work is a subject which is at the present time receiving much attention.

In *England* various experiments are being made, though we do not know quite on what grounds Mr. Caffyn, who gave evidence before the Charities' Commission in Melbourne, stated "In England we find eight hours a day ample." We doubt very much if many (if any) English Hospitals are working on these lines.

We re-print in another column the letter of a Nurse who writes to the *British Medical Journal*, expressing her views on this subject.

In *America*, at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, and at the Rochester Hospital, the experiment of an eight hours' working day is being tried, and we await with interest the opinion of those most competent to judge, after this system has stood the test of experience.

In *New Zealand*, an eight hours' day has been adopted with, we are told, the result that "everything is well arranged for the Nurses, but the *patients* seem of very secondary consideration."

In *Australia*, the question is a burning one at the present time. We hear, on excellent authority, that though the Government only a short time since threw out in both Houses the clause relative to Nurses from the Shop and Factories Bill for an eight hours shift, yet that the Treasurer of the Colony, Mr. Turner, who "has charge of the allocation of the charitable vote" is contemplating withdrawing all aid from Hospitals in which the Nurses work for more than eight hours a day. Some of the Hospital authorities object strongly to such a proceeding, and it was proposed on July 31st that "a monster deputation of Hospital authorities from all over the colony" should wait upon the Premier, and represent their side of the question to him.

We venture to hope that before Mr. Turner makes such an arbitrary stipulation with regard to monies placed at his disposal for charitable purposes he will make himself acquainted with all the bearings of the case. We submit that before all things the well-being of the patients must be considered. Secondly, the Nurses for whom these regulations are to be made should surely have a voice in the matter. We must also say that, to be logical, if Mr. Turner insists upon the Hospitals being nursed in eight hour shifts, he must, should he at any time require to be nursed himself, engage three private Nurses to attend to him, and also do his best to render it illegal for any private patient to engage less than this number of Nurses.

In the Hospitals, also, we should like to know if there are to be three ward Sisters in each ward, and three Matrons. We think that hardly anyone will be found to affirm that it is desirable there should be three Matrons in one Hospital; but then, if this plan is not considered workable, and the Matron is on duty as heretofore not only ten, twelve, and fourteen, but very often sixteen and eighteen hours a day, will this incapacitate the Hospital from receiving help from the "Charitable Vote," which we imagine answers somewhat to our "Hospital Sunday Fund," or does a woman cease to be a Nurse when she becomes a Matron?

We do not think that it is conducive to the welfare of the patients that the Nursing should be conducted by means of three shifts of Nurses. In our opinion, this would mean shiftless Nursing. It is often difficult to a patient to reconcile himself even to the present necessary change of night and day Nurses, so much so that in the Nursing of cases of abdominal section some surgeons even now insist that for the first three days the same Nurse shall attend the case night and day.

We cannot uphold this custom, but it serves to illustrate our point. In our judgment, a day of twelve hours, with three or four hours off duty each day, would be infinitely preferable to an arrangement of eight-hour shifts. We must point out also that the length of the period of training will have to be raised, otherwise the experience of the Nurses, at the end of their term of training, will be less than it is at the present time.

Next, the opinion of the Nurses themselves certainly deserves consideration on the part of the authorities. In the past, Nurses have suffered considerably by being legislated for by those who are not conversant with the pros and cons of the question at issue, and they are beginning to realise that, on purely Nursing questions, their interests are best served by being placed in the hands of their natural head in these matters, the Matron of their Hospital. It would be a wise step, therefore, for anyone who is concerned in legislating for Nurses, to obtain through the Matrons of the various Hospitals the *opinion of the Nurses themselves* on the question to be legislated upon.

In conclusion, we hope that the Nurses of the future, who are to have an eight hours day, no "menial work," and a training reduced to the nearest approach to "Nursing made easy," will be as devoted Nurses, and as satisfactory generally, as the Nurses of the past, who, with all their hard work, were proverbially a happy and contented race, who would have been exceedingly loth to change places with any other set of women on the face of the earth.

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