

Lectures on Elementary Physiology in relation to Medical Nursing.

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LECTURE IV.—THE EXCRETORY ORGANS.

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AFTER the first shock of a severe burn, the progress of the case depends more upon the extent of skin which is injured than upon the depth to which the injury extends. For example, a large burn, involving just the epidermis, is more dangerous to the patient than a small but apparently more severe injury in which the burn has extended down to the deeper tissues. This fact is one of the greatest importance, and is another illustration of the practical point to which attention has already been drawn—the importance of all injuries affecting the skin. Whenever the true skin has been burnt, the wound almost invariably heals by granulation—a process to which we shall soon refer at length, and which will then be seen to be very slow and gradual. The injured tissue is gradually closed up and renewed, and on the surface of the skin there is formed what is known as a scar or cicatrix; due to the fact that the new skin in such cases is destitute of sweat glands and the hair follicles, and that it also thickens or contracts as it heals. In wide scars of this kind, the contraction is sometimes so great that a wheal or ridge is formed, and sometimes this wheal takes on a peculiar kind of growth becoming converted into a reddened tissue which is known as KELOID. This is very disfiguring, and is most difficult of treatment; because if removed by the knife a wound is left which frequently takes on the same morbid appearance; and if destroyed by caustic or the cautery it also frequently recurs again.

The main work of the Nurse for patients suffering from an extensive burn is two-fold; first, she has to keep the healing surface as absolutely clean, and free from exposure to the air, as possible; for which she will receive, of course, particular directions from the doctor. But, beyond this, her special work will largely consist in maintaining the strength of the patient at as high a point as possible. She will remember that the discharge of pus that comes from the wounded surface practically

represents altered blood, and implies a constant strain upon the strength of the patient, and a constant drain from the highly specialised blood cells; and therefore the necessity of maintaining the patient's strength by appropriate nourishment is obvious. In any of these cases, stimulants are often given, because, although it is a wise rule of most medical men, nowadays, never to prescribe any form of alcohol unless it is absolutely necessary—in these cases, it is frequently found to be essential for two reasons; first, because it improves the patient's appetite and enables him to digest a meal which he would be unable to do if deprived of the stimulant to which he is probably accustomed. At the same time, it, temporarily at least, increases the force of the heart's action, and so maintains the general strength. To obtain these advantages in greatest measure, beverages which have dietetic properties are usually employed rather than those which are mere stimulants, such as brandy, or whiskey. For example, Stout, specially that form which is known as "Invalid or nourishing Stout," and mild ale or bitter beer are employed chiefly in these cases. On the other hand, there are many patients who are greatly benefited by Port wine or Burgundy; and it is a good general rule which doctors follow, to make as little alteration as possible, in the diet of patients suffering from injuries, from that to which they are accustomed when they are in health. For example—and though this may seem to be a digression, it is a very practical point—many doctors object to suddenly debar a patient who is laid up after a serious accident from intoxicating drinks, if he has been in the habit of taking them, even to excess; because a sudden change in this respect in a person suffering from the nerve shock of an injury is very frequently followed by an attack of that peculiar brain complaint known as Delirium Tremens; and many a patient, therefore, may be very materially injured and made worse by such an alteration in his diet when suffering from an injury. The rule which this particular instance enforces, is one which is followed with advantage in most cases of accident.

(To be continued.)

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Economical in use, and goes far in brewing.

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