

The Limitations of Pupil Nurses in Caring for Male Patients.*

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THE subject which I have been called upon to present to you to-day, namely, "The Limitations of Pupil Nurses' Duties in Caring for Male Patients," must be one of serious importance and consideration to everyone who is responsible for the training of those who have chosen for their calling that of the graduate Nurse; and I trust that I may be able to do justice to the subject from the standpoint of both patient and Nurse, and prove that a Nurse can take entire care of a male patient without loss of womanly dignity and modesty.

The term graduate Nurse implies far more than at first appears; it means, or should mean, a woman fully equipped for any emergency that may arise in her profession, and it is to us that she looks for the training which will assure her the knowledge necessary to this end, and it is in the Hospital wards that such knowledge must be gained. Herein lies our great responsibility to impart to those under our guidance the fundamental principle that no necessary duty to the sick, whether the patient be man or woman, can be either menial or immodest, if rendered in the proper spirit.

I use the term necessary duty advisedly, for there are some duties which may be necessary under some circumstances and not at other times. In the ordinary work in male wards it is easy to say where the limitation shall be in regard to Nursing. All large Hospitals have orderlies who do all the work that would be unpleasant for the Nurse, her duties being confined to the giving of medicines, and treatment such as is not of a private nature; serving meals and seeing that the patients are made generally comfortable and receive the necessary care given by the orderly, for even here strict personal supervision is required of the head Nurse, or she will find dirty toe-nails, and something worse. I shall never forget my own mortification one day while serving as ward head Nurse, when the attending surgeon turned down the bedclothes of a simple fracture case and displayed a condition of things for which in one way I was not responsible, but which taught me the lesson that the work, so far as the orderly was concerned, would need much looking after.

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As I said before, we can easily limit the Nurse's duties where the patients are not critically ill, but where shall we place the limitation in cases of typhoid, pneumonia, or critical surgical cases, where the life of the patient often depends upon skilled Nursing? We all know and have suffered from the class of men who usually present themselves to our hospitals as orderlies; as a rule they are ignorant and careless, even though they may be willing and kind. They fail to make the distinction between the social cleanliness of their class and true surgical cleanliness. Few of them understand the saving grace of soap and water, and when we do find one who ranks above the average in intelligence and skill we are apt to find him also possessed of a besetting weakness whose effects are only too visible after pay-day. This is the class of men, with few exceptions, and I do not think I have overdrawn them, on whom must fall the Nursing which lies outside the limitations of the Nurse.

In these cases, perhaps, some would place the limit at giving full sponge baths, the placing of bed-pan, and subsequent cleansing of the patient, giving enemata, passing the catheter, and dressing of wounds or blisters in the pelvic region.

Is any good Nurse who is caring for a critically sick man, watching almost hourly for the appearance of the much to be dreaded bed-sore, willing to take the risk that all her efforts of skill and care should be frustrated by the rough manipulations of the orderly in bathing, or the careless placing of the bed-pan, which may convert the tender spot she has guarded with jealous care into a bed-sore, which not only adds to the present misery of the patient, but may retard his recovery? Evidently we cannot place the limitation here so long as the patient requires gentle, intelligent care, which can only be properly given by the true woman Nurse.

In a Hospital it is unnecessary for a Nurse to pass the male catheter, but every Nurse should be taught the method, and it can be easily done upon children and unconscious patients. No Nurse should consider her knowledge complete unless she is able in her private work to meet this emergency, which is often of a most serious and distressing character, but it is only in cases of urgent necessity that a Nurse should be called upon to perform this duty.

In a surgical ward a Nurse may be called upon to do dressings, such as abdominal wounds, supra-pubic lithotomies, inguinal hernia, and hip-joint diseases, that are of an unpleasant nature, but with care, exposure can be avoided and the knowledge that a good, pure-minded woman is willing to so care for him has its

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