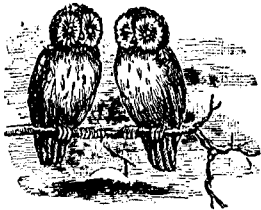


Matrons in Council.

Hospital Laundries.*

By GEORGIA NEVINS,

Superintendent Garfield Hospital Training School,
Washington, D.C.



IN the circulars sent out by some of our schools for nurses, we say: "Only those best suited for the work can be considered, etc." I feel that the position of the unsuccessful applicant should have been mine to-day, inasmuch as I must at once disclaim any special knowledge of my subject. At the same time, it is one which is not without interest. I find that many superintendents of Training Schools have given it thought, and more would be only too glad of the privilege. "The work of the laundry is the one part of the hospital that I am not proud of," one of them says. Another: "This department is the most unsatisfactory in the hospital." A third: "We simply have to do the best we can with the means at our disposal." A fourth has from past experience been deeply interested in the management of laundries, as she found a great deal of mismanagement connected with them. She adds that she would rather state what she would like done, than what she has accomplished.

Information was requested concerning the marking, listing, the disposal of soiled clothing before reaching laundry, sorting, stains, disinfection, distribution and losses. This included the work required of nurses, the equipment of the laundry, and as far as possible its management. I wrote only to those Training Schools whose Superintendents are members of this Association. Answers were received from fifty hospitals. In fourteen, the office of Superintendent of Nurses and Matron is combined, and she is responsible for the work of the laundry. In others a Matron or housekeeper, and in two a man has charge.

MARKING.

First, as to the marking of linen: pen and indelible ink with name of ward, dining room or whatever is desired, only, is in use in some hospitals. Others have a stencil plate with name of hospital in full, and the name of each department in addition. The name or number stitched with red marking cotton is another method, and rubber stamps are also mentioned. Marking by hand with pen and Payson's ink may be most satisfactory to many, and is, undoubtedly, more lasting, but the work involved is a consideration.

* Read before the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, in Toronto, Canada, February, 1898.

It would seem also that the full name of the hospital is desirable. An objection to the stencil is that the ink fades rapidly, but this is not an unmixed evil when pieces which are no longer good enough for one department, like towels, etc., in private wards, may be re-marked for another. Directions for application of heat to the ordinary stencil ink do not usually come with it, but the sun or a hot iron renders it more indelible. New linen, especially towels, should be washed before marking.

LISTING.

As in more than half the hospitals clothes are not listed before sending to laundry, there must be some doubt as to the benefits derived. Only five out of fifty list clothes in both wards and laundry. In about fifteen hospitals clothes are listed by probationers and junior nurses; in two by head nurse of ward, who sends a duplicate list in the bag, and clothes are recounted by the sorter, under the supervision of the head laundress. The seamstress counts clothes in the clothes room of one hospital before they are sent to the laundry.

Patients' clothing is usually listed by the nurses. It is the custom to have books of printed duplicate lists, one to be retained, and the other sent to the laundry with the clothes. In one hospital, this list is returned checked by laundress. In order that this system succeed, it is highly necessary that the counting be done thoroughly at least twice before leaving wards, and when clean clothes are returned. Accuracy might demand two additional countings in the laundry for purpose of comparison, but I venture to say that this is rarely, if ever, attempted. The fact that so many Superintendents of Training Schools do not control the laundry, explains, for the most part, I have no doubt, the general indifference to listing, as a protection from loss of linen in that department. One of the difficulties in some hospitals is that however carefully clothes may be counted in wards, different relays of linen are returned, and any comparison of count is, to say the least, discouraging in result.

Possibly my own experience is unlike that of superintendents in northern hospitals, in that the maids are colored, more or less ignorant and irresponsible, with an idea that the eighth commandment does not apply in institutions. For this reason I am convinced that counting the clean clothes in their presence and that of my assistant does not at any rate tend toward a decrease of the linen supply. For the same reason, also, it seems best for all laundry employers to sleep in the hospital buildings when possible.

DISPOSAL OF SOILED CLOTHING.

Dry soiled clothing is usually placed in hampers, in bags of canvas or ticking, or covered tin boxes

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