

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

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CHAPTER III.

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IN these cases, it can readily be understood that antiseptic precautions are of the highest importance. In many cases, the pleural cavity is washed out through the opening of the chest with some antiseptic solution so as to disinfect the secreting surface of the pleura; and some surgeons still dress the wound under the carbolic spray, hoping thus to prevent the admission of septic germs and to shorten the progress of the case. The majority, however, at the present day, believe in absolute cleanliness and boiled water; and, beyond this, they dislike the application of manifold layers of wool as tending somewhat to prevent the free discharge of pus through the drainage tube.

The chief rules for the nurse to remember are that it is all-important for the patient to have an abundant supply of fresh and pure air, and for the room and his surroundings to be absolutely clean. If the surgeon requires boiled water to irrigate the chest, the nurse should make it her business to see not only that the kettle is absolutely clean but that the water does actually boil for ten minutes; and to pour it herself into an absolutely clean glass vessel covering it, from the air, either with a glass top, or, if that cannot be obtained, with a perfectly clean towel which has wrung out of a solution of one in 60 carbolic, and removing this covering only when the water is required for use. In like manner, it is a good precaution, in private nursing, to have all the wool and bandages placed in a tin receptacle and baked in the oven for a few minutes every morning; being then kept from the air until they are needed for application.

Sometimes, these patients exhibit, from the first, symptoms of blood poisoning, due to the absorption of pus into the lymphatic system, and, once the characteristic abscesses appear in different parts of the body the case assumes the gravest aspect, and the lung complication becomes almost of secondary importance, except in so far as it is possible by stringent antiseptic measures to prevent the pus in the

chest from adding constantly fresh fuel to the general infection of the system.

In addition to the great care which is requisite for the local condition, nurses must remember that these cases of Empyema resemble all other cases in which pus is being formed in the body, in the rapid deterioration which takes place in the patient's health. The pus-cells represent in fact the loss of highly organised material and therefore make a severe drain on the body's power of production—a waste of strength which, unless it can be equalised or exceeded by the nourishment taken, must lead to the patient's death. The question of the dietary is therefore one of the greatest importance, and the doctor will probably lay down precise instructions especially as to the amounts of foods and the kinds of foods and stimulants which the patient must be persuaded to take. It is here, therefore, that the trained nurse finds her great opportunity for good; and, especially if she has some knowledge of invalid cooking, her efforts may make the difference of life or death to the patient. It is an old-fashioned but excellent rule to trust in this matter to the patient's fancy. It is better that he should take some unusual food, with pleasure, rather than be persuaded to take some excellent dietary against his inclination. In sickness, especially, the French proverb holds good, and the appetite comes with eating. It is a practical fact and well worth remembering, that the appetite comes still more with drinking; and that soups, milk, barley water or even simple water alone, will probably make the patient, who takes these, more hungry than will be the patient who takes a very dry diet. In cases of convalescence, few stimulants show such excellent results as bottled stout; and if the form used be that known as Invalid Stout, the results obtained may be excellent. Some of these preparations not only stimulate but also nourish the patient; and, probably in consequence of the liquorice and glycerine which they contain, they often have a useful subsidiary action as aperients.

Some patients, however, cannot take malt liquors in any form. As a general rule, Port wine is the stimulant then recommended, and, if it be left to the nurse to obtain the wine, it is a practical point well worth remembering that what is called Tawny Port is the most easily borne by, and the most beneficial to, invalids.

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