

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

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CHAPTER V.

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In the latter case, the bleeding may be very considerable without the patient, or anyone else being aware of it, and may continue until the stomach is sufficiently irritated to cause vomiting. Then the presence of the dark blood may not only alarm the patient, and his friends, but, until the doctor examines the throat and discovers the source of the bleeding, may be believed to be caused by some serious disease of the lungs, or of the stomach. The point, then, to be remembered is very important—that the "spitting of blood" does not necessarily mean either that the patient is in a dangerous condition or that he is suffering from Consumption.

We come now to the chief symptom of Phthisis, and indeed, of all other lung complaints—the cough. In many instances, this is most distressing; in all, it is a source of great discomfort to the patient. In the early stages of Phthisis, the cough is probably hard and the expectoration difficult to expel; but as the disease progresses, and the secretion from the breathing tract becomes greater, the sputum is increased in quantity, and more readily expectorated. The matter consists of mucus often mixed with pus, and therefore represents a constant and serious drain upon the patient's strength. In consequence, it may be stated as a generally accurate fact, that the more yellow and liquid the phlegm is, that is to say, the more pus the patient is passing from his lungs, the more rapid is the local progress of his disease, and the greater will be the daily loss of strength. When the phlegm is black and mucous, it comes from the bronchial tubes; and does not represent, either the loss of tissue or the drain upon the general health, which the formation of the pus involves.

The first effort of the doctor is to clear the tubes of their secretion—that is to say, to permit the air to pass freely into the air cells—and thus to enable the lungs to perform their ordinary work, a function which is impossible if the tubes are choked with phlegm. But, once the expectoration is rendered easy, the medical treatment is directed to checking the amount of the secretion, and thus relieving the

patient by clearing the lung passages of their abnormal contents. For this purpose, medicines and inhalations are employed, and it will be the duty of the nurse to see that the medical directions in this particular are scrupulously carried out; so she must clearly understand the principle of the treatment. In brief, it is founded upon the modern knowledge of Consumption, and of the antiseptic system. The disease being caused, and maintained, by germ growths, it is of the first importance that the latter should be destroyed, if possible, by the direct or indirect application of some powerful germicide. To effect this, various drugs have been given by the mouth or injected under the skin; but still better results have been obtained by the employment of antiseptics in the form of vapour, which is thus brought directly to the seat of the disease. Such applications are made in the form of inhalations, either by impregnating the air of the patient's room—which is a somewhat clumsy and wasteful method—or by pouring the antiseptic on lint or cotton wool, placed in the mouthpiece of a respirator, or by medicated vapours from a vaporiser, nebuliser, or ordinary inhaler.

But, after all, most excellent results have been obtained by absolutely pure air. Just as many of the most successful operators of the present day have discarded the carbolic acid spray and the other cumbersome paraphernalia which were considered essential thirty years ago, and carry out the principle of cleanliness with plenty of soap and hot water; so, in the treatment of Phthisis, placing the patient in a perfectly pure air, even if the temperature be abnormally cold, is found to cleanse the lungs and to kill the bacilli quite as satisfactorily as by the administration of antiseptic vapours. Combined, however, with this treatment, and probably in no small measure conducive to its success, is the method adopted for feeding the patient. Acting on the well known facts that the patient's general health and strength have been greatly deteriorated by his disease, and that, if his tissues are better nourished, they will be able more successfully to resist the progress of the complaint, patients under the open air treatment are given nutritious food at frequent intervals, and in as large quantities as they can be persuaded to take, while they are encouraged to obtain as much outdoor exercise as possible.

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