

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

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CHAPTER V.

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In fact, exercise in the open air is essential, not only in order to enable the patient to digest the large quantities of food which are given, but also for the sake of the lungs. And it will not be inappropriate to digress for a moment in order to consider the importance of bodily exercise for those who are suffering from chronic lung diseases or any tendency to such disease. The muscular movements of the body by compressing the blood vessels materially assist in the circulation of the blood, and, at the same time, they make the respiratory process more complete. Because, by pumping the venous blood more rapidly into the right heart, its action is increased, and so the blood is passed more quickly into the pulmonary circulation. So the lungs are incited to inspire and expire more speedily, the air which the blood requires for its oxygenation. And with this increased quantity of air entering the organs every minute, the air cells, so to speak, are more efficiently flushed and cleansed.

A patient reclining on a bed or sofa, or even propped up in a chair, does not breathe so fully as if he were moving about in the open air. His chest muscles suffer, like all the other muscles of his body, from want of use; and, therefore, the movements of the chest and the consequent expansion of the lungs are more or less deficient. The consequence is that the air, especially in the lower, and most dependent parts, of the lungs is not breathed in and out of the air-cells frequently and fully, as is necessarily the case when the patient is walking about outside the house. The air which remains in the air-cells having already been deprived of its oxygen and loaded with carbonic acid is useless for the purpose of purifying the blood, which, therefore, circulates through the system without the reviving influence which it should have, and which it does possess when freely supplied with oxygen. The whole system, therefore, suffers; the nervous system becomes weakened, the gastric juices and the digestive powers are depreciated, and the whole body consequently deteriorates.

But the greatest detriment of all is naturally suffered by the special organs of respiration, and, if there be any tendency to disease, this is materially increased by the want of its special cleanser, that is to say, oxygen.

To fill the lungs frequently with pure air forms, therefore, a very considerable part of the modern treatment of lung diseases, and especially of phthisis. What may be described as lung gymnastics is enjoined by many practitioners. The patient is directed to breathe in and out as deeply as possible and thus clear his lungs of air at each expiration. If he can be sent away to some mountainous region in which the air is perfectly pure, even if it is somewhat cold, and where he can take regular daily walks, the advantages of the method are secured in the fullest measure. The rarity of the atmosphere makes him breathe more deeply, the purity of the air fully oxygenates his blood, and the active exercise which is enjoined as part of the cure assists in the expansion of the lungs, the better performance of their function, and in the removal of existing disease. Even in cases where the patient's circumstances do not permit him to obtain these advantages, in the most complete manner, it is possible to carry out the same principles in a modified degree, by moving the patient into some healthy country place, and keeping the windows and doors widely open. Especially if there be pine woods in the neighbourhood the air he breathes is rendered not only pure but antiseptic. And, even in our much abused climate it is possible to obtain a great deal of outdoor exercise on the majority of days in the year.

The first requisite, then, for the successful treatment of the Cough in the case of Phthisis, as in all other lung diseases, is to give the patient an abundant supply of pure air. Next to this, as already stated, antiseptic vapours are most commonly employed; in such cases the practitioner will give the nurse special directions both for their preparation and administration. As regards the administration of drugs, there are certain practical points which are of much importance in the nursing. In the first place, the majority of patients suffering from Phthisis, have more or less congestion of the throat, very often because of the frequent irritation which is caused by the coughing and expectoration, but sometimes because of tubercular ulceration of the larynx.

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