

Lectures on the Nursing of Lung Diseases.

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CHAPTER V.

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THIS is a matter of which it is difficult to exaggerate the importance, especially in advanced cases of Phthisis; and private nurses should, therefore, when the choice of the particular Oil is left to them, be always most careful to purchase one of the above-mentioned preparations, the purity of which is assured, and its freedom from the repugnant taste of the ordinary forms. Some patients, however, cannot take Cod Liver Oil in liquid form at all, and for these, the preparation in capsules is very valuable.

One of the most distressing symptoms of advanced cases of Phthisis is the profuse night sweats from which such patients frequently suffer. They wake up, sometimes several times during the night, bathed in perspiration, which has soaked through the night-dress and the sheets. It is obvious that such a loss of fluid from the tissues weakens the patient very greatly. And, unless great care be taken, the wet clothes render him liable to a chill, and perhaps, therefore, to a fresh attack of inflammation of the lungs. The nurse, therefore, in order to prevent the latter consequences, must take various common-sense precautions. The patient should wear a flannel or woollen night-gown so as to obviate the chance of a chill as far as possible, and the bed-clothes must not be too heavy for fear of raising his temperature and thus increasing the tendency to perspiration. In summer weather, this simple precaution is especially necessary, and the night-gown should be made of flannel, or thin woollen material. If the perspiration is at all profuse, it is better to change the sheets and night-gown at once. At the same time, in many cases, great comfort is afforded to the patient by sponging the skin with tepid water containing a little toilet Vinegar or toilet Ammonia.

Fortunately, at the present day, various drugs are employed which prevent these exhausting night-sweats to a large extent. For example, Atropia is largely used in minute doses in the form of pills for this purpose, and often with speedy and complete relief. A great disadvantage of the drug, however, is that it

tends in some cases to cause disturbances of the eyesight, and in others to derange the action of the kidneys. Some patients are peculiarly susceptible to the drug, and exhibit at once the dilatation of the pupil of the eye which belladonna always causes, and which therefore interferes with proper vision; and such indistinctness of sight may alarm the patient very greatly unless the nurse explains that he is not losing his sight, but that it is merely a temporary and well-known effect produced by the drug. In other cases, Atropia again, often produces a marked degree of dryness of the throat and mouth, which is much complained of, and which often gives Phthisical patients special discomfort by increasing their cough. In general terms, it may be said that whenever any of these untoward effects are produced, more harm than good is done to the patient. It is, therefore, a matter of the first importance that the nurse should understand the possibility of such results being produced—and that she should be on the alert to detect them when they do occur. Not only that, as already explained, she can greatly reassure the patient, but also that she may materially assist the doctor by at once reporting to him the facts—which will perhaps lead him to discontinue the use of the drug.

During the last year or two, Sulphonal has been largely used to prevent night sweats, and has proved in many cases very effective for that purpose. It has the additional advantage of also affording the patient quiet and refreshing sleep, and is, probably, a medicine which will be largely employed, in future, in Phthisical cases. It is worth while remembering that some patients exhibit a reddish eruption on the skin after taking Sulphonal—an accident which has sometimes caused alarm, and the fear that they were suffering from one of the infectious fevers. Except for a little irritation and inconvenience, however, no harm is caused. But, at the same time, it is a symptom of poisoning—even if in a very mild form—and, therefore, whenever such an eruption shows itself, it should be at once reported to the doctor, and no further doses should be given to the patient until further instructions have been obtained.

Fortunately, the great majority of Phthisical patients are able to take both Atropia and Sulphonal without any ill effects, and so the depressing and exhausting night sweats can usually be prevented.

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