

The Nursing of Heart Diseases.

BY BEDFORD FENWICK, M.D.

Late Senior Assistant Physician to the City of London Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.

CHAPTER III.

(Continued from page 188.)

If the patient has to be kept so completely at rest in bed, it is evident that careful precautions will be necessary, from the very first, to prevent the injurious effects of pressure; and Nurses who have carefully read the foregoing Lectures will easily understand the additional liability of patients suffering from Heart Disease to suffer from bed sores.

The tendency to congestion, especially of the most dependent parts of the body, which, as we have already seen, is found in every organ in consequence of the obstruction to the flow of blood through the heart, makes the skin softer, and therefore more prone to injury from long continued pressure.

So, every nurse who is aware of these facts will take the earliest possible precautions to obviate the danger of such an occurrence. In fact, it is wise, as a general rule, in private practice, to put such patients at once upon a water or air-bed; because, at the beginning of an attack of Endocarditis, it is impossible to say how ill the patient may become, or for how long a period it may be necessary to keep him strictly in bed. For the same reason, the greatest attention must be paid, from the commencement of the attack, to the condition of the back and heels and the additional use of air pads, or even cotton wool, to protect these surfaces may be the means of averting future danger; whilst it is almost unnecessary to add that special care should be taken to use spirit and powder to harden and dry the exposed surfaces.

Another practical point may be referred to with advantage. Not only to save the back from continued pressure, but also for the patient's comfort, he is frequently moved on to his right side; because, as has already been mentioned, few patients suffering from Endocarditis can lie on the left side because of the increased sensation of palpitation which they then experience. When the patient is turned on to the side, the Nurse should always remember that the back should be firmly supported by means of pillows laid behind it, so that as little muscular exertion as possible shall

be required on the part of the patient in order to retain his position. It is a practical fact which probably all nurses know that, when a patient is dangerously ill, he is usually unable to lie on his side without assistance, for the simple reason that this requires considerable muscular exertion. Such a patient so placed will therefore fall over on to his face or on to his back. Common sense teaches us, therefore, that in such cases the back should be well supported by means of pillows placed along it, and against which the patient can be propped, so as both to increase his comfort and to diminish his muscular efforts. Nurses will be able to adapt the means which they possess, in any instance, to the special requirements of their particular patient provided they keep this principle always in memory.

In this connection, it is worth while noting, that when such patients are able to be moved from their beds, nothing affords them greater comfort and change than to be placed in a well slung hammock, which, in many ways, is the most comfortable couch that a patient who has been very ill, and who, therefore, is very weak, can be given. But it is essential that the hammock shall be well slung, that is to say that its cords should be attached at a sufficient distance from each end to allow the hammock itself to be fairly straight. The object is to make the patient comfortable; and nothing can be more uncomfortable than a hammock which hangs at such an angle as to transform the body occupying it into the shape of the letter V. It must also be fairly near to the ground so as to allow the patient to be placed, or to get, in and out of the hammock quite easily. If it, therefore, be placed in a room, it is better to have the staples fixed in the wall about 4 feet from the floor; and it is needless to add the Nurse should always have the strength of the hammock and the security of its supports very carefully tested before placing her patient in it. Few things would be worse for a patient suffering from Heart disease than for his hammock to break down, while he was lying in it. The sudden fright of the fall would cause sufficient disturbance of the heart's action, probably, to induce an attack of syncope, or even cause more permanent harm. The patient, indeed, would be injured by the nervous shock rather than by the mere fall, especially if, as has already been suggested, the hammock were slung quite close to the floor.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)