

## The Nursing of Heart Diseases.

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### CHAPTER III.

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THERE are, however, drugs which are very often used in these cases, and for reasons beyond their merely aperient action. The sulphates of soda or magnesia are largely employed, not only to prevent or to relieve constipation, but also in order to prevent or relieve congestion of the pelvic and abdominal blood-vessels. The effects of either drug are to cause a flow of serous fluid from the blood-vessels of the intestines into the bowels, thus depleting the fluid part of the blood and acting to all practical purposes in the same way as if the patient had been bled from the arm. The actual amount of the blood in the body is, therefore, reduced in quantity, and thus the work of the heart is lessened; seeing that a smaller quantity of fluid in a given time is required to pass through the injured organ. It will be easily understood from what has been said, in previous lectures; that when there has been much valvular obstruction such a lessening of the amount of blood will save the patient considerable discomfort, if not actual danger, by lessening the amount and extent of congestion of the internal organs, and, indeed, will often afford incalculable relief to the patient.

There are practical points connected with the administration of these drugs which must not be forgotten. In the first place, it will easily be understood that the mere depletion of the blood-vessels implies a certain amount of exhaustion of the patient's strength, and, as a practical fact, few patients are able to take these drugs without being more or less weakened thereby. It is, therefore, customary to combine them with some form of tonic, which, while not lessening the aperient effect, diminishes the strain on the patient's strength.

In many cases, however, the sulphates are prescribed in the form of mineral waters, such, for example, as Hunyadi, or Apenta, both of which, and especially the latter, are very largely and most usefully employed in cases of Heart diseases. If, then, such a patient, after taking such a water, exhibits any signs of exhaustion, or faintness, the nurse must be prepared to administer at once some stimulant either in the

shape of sal-volatile or better still of Brandy or Whiskey; the occurrence of such a symptom, of course, being at once reported to the doctor, who will, doubtless, have foreseen its possibility, and have, therefore, instructed the nurse what particular form and amount of stimulant shall be administered.

The other preparation to which allusion has been made is Glycerine—given either in the form of an enema, or as a suppository. The peculiar property of this fluid is its remarkable affinity for water; so that it can suck up from the blood-vessels of any part to which it is applied some of their fluid constituents. In the case of a rectal application of Glycerine, the blood-vessels pour out a quantity of serum into the rectum, which, therefore, acts to all intents and purposes exactly as an ordinary enema would do—distending the bowel, softening and loosening scybala, and causing contraction of the muscular walls of the rectum and expulsion of its contents. There is a special advantage in the use of Glycerine, therefore, in these cases when there is much vascular congestion present, inasmuch as it relieves the circulation to some extent in addition to acting as an aperient.

One word of caution, however, is necessary as to all remedies, when the inflammation has involved the aortic valves. It is often, then, a matter of the utmost importance to prevent any weakening of the patient, however slight, because the heart is extremely susceptible in these cases to any disturbance in the general system, and it is in patients suffering from aortic disease, that, as already said, there is an urgent need of promptitude in the administration of stimulants, whenever there be any sign of faintness.

It will, therefore, be realised that the nurse must be most scrupulously careful not to give such patients any form of aperient medicine without express directions from the doctor. In ordinary cases, of course, much discretion is left to the trained nurse, as to the need for increasing or diminishing the dose of such drugs prescribed by the practitioner, according to the effects produced from day to day. But in cases of heart disease, and especially whenever there is advanced aortic mischief, the patient's condition is often so critical that only a careful medical examination can determine whether an aperient can be borne; and, in that case, how large, or how small, a dose can be safely administered.

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