

The Nursing of Heart Diseases.

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CHAPTER IV.

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These patients, however, sometimes require as much nursing as the worst forms of heart disease. They must be kept at perfect rest in bed; generally with the head and shoulders somewhat raised, so as to lessen the violent throbbing in the head and ears, which prevents sleep and often alarms the patient when the head is lowered. They must be so tactfully managed by the nurse that they shall be persuaded of their ultimate recovery; and they must be kept as free as possible, not only from disturbing noise, but from any bad news. So the greatest tact is often required to prevent injudicious friends from depressing the patient by retailing news likely to distress or even to worry him.

With regard to drugs, Iron is almost invariably given in these cases, and the nurse can give, by careful reports, the greatest assistance to the doctor. She must observe, for instance, whether the medicine is taken and borne well by the patient, or whether, as so frequently happens, it appears to interfere both with appetite and digestion. It is also, for the same reason, most important to note whether it causes constipation; because it may be taken, as a good general rule, that whenever iron produces this effect it will do the patient no good. But, on the other hand, if the intestinal action is not disturbed by the metal, it will probably improve the patient's blood condition, and therefore be beneficial to the general health; and it is almost an aphorism that, if patients suffering from functional palpitation of the heart can take iron and strychnia well, they will speedily recover.

It need, therefore, scarcely be pointed out how important a part the nurse can play in the treatment of these patients by carefully noticing and reporting to the doctor these several points.

The next essential in the treatment, is that the patient shall be afforded an abundance of fresh air; and in many of these cases a cure is most rapidly effected by sending the patient to a bracing place on the sea-coast or some mountainous health resort. The blood hungers, in fact, for oxygen; and by being freely supplied

with the gas its improvement, and that of the heart's muscle is most rapidly effected.

As soon as the patient, then, is able to move, gentle exercise is advantageous, both to improve the general circulation and to restore tone to the muscular system. But no exercise must ever be permitted by the nurse, until it is definitely directed by the medical practitioner; because, sometimes, in these cases of heart weakness, prolonged fainting attacks occur, as soon as any movement is attempted; and it may be most difficult to restore consciousness. As a rule, the best restorative is some form of counter-irritant, such as the homely mustard poultice over the region of the heart, or the application of spirits of turpentine to the chest; but, in extreme cases, an enema of brandy or whisky is often necessary and effectual. These attacks of syncope, in fact, are the gravest danger to which these patients are liable, and it is one, therefore, which the nurse must always bear in mind—and be prepared for.

In bringing this course of Lectures to a conclusion, the author desires to acknowledge the many kindly letters which he has received from various readers of this journal concerning them. He need scarcely point out that he has not attempted to write a set description of the ordinary Diseases of the Heart; and no one can recognise more clearly than himself that matters have been omitted which might be of interest to nurses. He has merely endeavoured to explain, in language as simple and as free from technicalities as possible, some of the many practical points which arise in the nursing of patients suffering from those diseases, together with an equally simple account of the causes for those symptoms, and of the ordinary course pursued by the various diseases in question.

He is therefore glad to know that the articles are said to have been practically useful to a section of his readers; and, in response to a number of requests, will promise that, as soon as he can find time, these Lectures, and those of the preceding course upon Diseases of the Lungs, shall be published together in book form. If they have enabled any nurse to attend with greater intelligence and usefulness upon patients suffering from very distressing forms of illness, or have rendered her work more interesting and easy to herself, the author will feel amply repaid for the time and trouble he has devoted, during the past two years, to the writing of these notes.

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