

The Administration of Medicines.

A lecture to Probationers at the National Sanatorium, Bournemouth, by the Matron,

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LAST week we considered the giving of drugs to patients by mouth only, but there are various other means of administering them, with which a trained nurse is expected to be familiar.

The first and most important of these is by making use of the property of absorption possessed by the skin. Many drugs can be introduced into the system by this means, either in medicated baths or rubbed into or painted on the skin, or applied in the form of lotions, poultices, or fomentations.

The use of baths as a means of the administration of drugs can only be employed to a very limited extent, as very few drugs can be absorbed by the unbroken skin unless they have previously been mixed with some fatty substance.

Salt baths are very frequently given for rheumatism but it is a very great question how far their beneficial effects are due to any absorption of salt, the baths acting more as a "tonic remedy" by improving the general tone and nutrition of the skin through the stimulation of the cutaneous nerve endings and the capillaries.

In order to resemble sea-water as much as possible, 9 lbs. salt to 30 gall. water is the usual proportion for a salt bath.

This bath is sometimes prepared with chopped seaweed; it is then termed an "ozone" bath.

Sulphur is a drug which is very readily absorbed and excreted, even in the form of a dry powder, by the unbroken skin. It is often prescribed as a bath in some forms of skin disease; the usual formula being 8 oz. sulphide of potassium to 30 gal. of water. These baths have a most unpleasant smell, and will turn any metal black with which the sulphur or its fumes come in contact.

Valerian baths are sometimes given to soothe the nerves of an hysterical patient, the immersion lasting generally from one to two hours at a time.

Other sedative baths are those to which decoctions of lavender or hyssop are added.

When nitro-muriatic acid baths are given, the nurse must see that earthenware or wooden baths are used; these baths are generally ordered to be taken every other night for a fairly long period, perhaps three weeks, each immersion lasting about thirty minutes.

In all cases when medicated baths are prescribed, the nurse must be careful to obtain full instructions from the physician as to:—

(1) The proportion in which the drug is to be added.

(2) The length of time desired for each immersion.

(3) The temperature at which the bath is to be given.

(4) Whether the temperature is to be kept at a uniform heat during the whole time the patient is in the bath.

Iodide of potassium is not often now used as a medicated bath, the general belief being that it is not in this form capable of absorption by the skin and that in those cases when it was undoubtedly excreted from the system after such a bath, the drug in question had only dried on the external surface of the patient's body until the fatty secretions of the skin glands had mixed with it and so rendered it capable of absorption.

This property of absorbing fatty substances by the skin is very largely made use of by the physician, certain drugs being incorporated with some kind of grease, principally lard, and then well rubbed into the patient's skin.

This process is known as "inunction"; it may be anodyne—as when belladonna or opium are employed,—or remedial—as in the case of a mercurial ointment. The action of the drug may be limited to the area over which it is applied or intended to affect the patient's whole system.

The external parts of the human body which will absorb such applications the most readily are the axillæ, the inside of the thighs, and the abdomen. In cases where the whole system is to be benefitted, it is well to choose a different site for the "rubbing" each night to avoid making the skin sore; should any signs of irritation appear after an application, all ointment should be at once washed off the part affected.

If the patient be well enough, a warm bath of fifteen minutes' duration, 85 degrees to 95 degrees F., before inunction, will greatly increase the skin's power of absorption; if, however, he be not able to have this, the part of his body to be rubbed should be well washed, before the rubbing in of the ointment, with warm soap and water, followed by alcohol.

The "rubbing in" should be done with the palms and soft finger tips of the nurse's hands, the friction being gently and evenly applied for about thirty minutes at a time, unless orders to the contrary be given by the medical man.

The inunction must take place in a warm room, under a blanket and, if possible, in front of a fire; the part treated must not be washed afterwards, but wrapped up in warm wool or a flannel bandage to promote absorption.

Nurses practising inunction must bestow great care upon their hands, for not only is a rough

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