

Text Book of Materia Medica for Nurses.

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We have received from Messrs. G. P. Putnam & Sons, 24, Bedford Street, Strand, a copy of Miss Dock's "Materia Medica for Nurses," price 6s., which has now been arranged to present the names of drugs, the doses, etc., in accordance with the British Pharmacopœia, in the hope that the wide sphere of usefulness it has found in America may be extended to this country. The book was first published in America, in 1890, since which time it has run through twenty-three editions. We can only express our admiration of the masterly way in which it has been compiled, and hope that its circulation in this country will be in accordance with its merits.

We have no hesitation in saying that it should be in the hands of every nurse. It is singularly free from technicalities, and contains nothing which nurses should not be expected to know. At the same time it is indubitable that it contains much of which the majority of nurses are in ignorance, we can even imagine the General Medical Council, in solemn conclave assembled, placing it on an index expurgatorius, as being entirely beyond the legitimate province of a nurse. But, after all wherein does that legitimate province consist? Surely in a knowledge of all those things upon which she is expected to give an intelligent report to the medical man in charge of the case or cases. She is with the patient constantly between his short daily visits, she has unique opportunities for observation. It is however a well-known truth that we only see what we are trained to observe, how then can a nurse recognize effects and symptoms of which she is absolutely ignorant? Or if here and there an exceptionally-intelligent woman is keen enough to do so, she has painfully and laboriously to discover for herself facts already well known which should be presented to her by her teachers in a systematic and assimilable form, having mastered which she can pass on to other studies. Take as an instance the physiological actions of iron, a drug constantly prescribed. How many nurses know them?

Their knowledge probably begins and ends with the facts that it is a tonic, that it is constipating in certain forms and that the stools are colored black by it. They will learn from Miss Dock, that "iron may be more properly described as a food than a medicine, being one of the most essential constituents of the red corpuscles." Further, it stimulates and strengthens the heart, nerves, and muscles, raises the temperature of the body and increases the appetite. Its action on exposed tissues and mucous surfaces is astringent, and it is thus classed as a styptic or hæmostatic. Taken internally, if given in excess, or on an empty stomach, it decomposes the digestive fluid. It sometimes has an irritant action on the bladder, and is said to decrease secretion of milk in nursing women. Any one or more of the following symptoms may be noticed in administering a course of iron, and indicate an excess in the system. "Frontal headache, slight disturbances of the digestion, irritation of the stomach, or of the

bladder, a feeling of weight at the epigastrium, constipation, a feverish condition. An acne of the face and chest is sometimes produced by iron, and the reduced iron causes eructations of gas.

It is very important to remember that all preparations of iron stain clothing, carpets—in fact, everything touched, and that the stains are with difficulty removed. Silver spoons should never be used for iron, but if they have been used the stain will come off if rubbed with ammonia water undiluted. Oxalic acid will take the stains out of muslin and linen."

This a single instance of the comprehensive and practical way in which the effects of each drug are noticed. All the points mentioned are effects for which a nurse should watch. But is it to be expected of a busy medical practitioner that every time he prescribes a dose of iron he should detail these points to the nurse? Most assuredly not. Then it becomes essential that this knowledge should form part of the education of the undergraduate nurse. Throughout the book, golden practical plums are given. Thus: "In feeding babies and young children a pinch of salt should always be added to the milk, as its action opposes the formation of hard curds in the milk."

"Silver jewellery worn by a patient taking sulphur becomes discoloured by the excretions of the skin."

"Sulphur fumigation after contagious diseases has been entirely discarded. It is, however, of real value in ridding a room or ward of bed-bugs, if these pests have lodged in the wall and wood-work, and for this purpose steam is not necessary."

"Senna is excreted by the kidneys and the mammary glands. Nursing infants in this way feels its action as a laxative."

"The secretion of saliva is checked by belladonna, and this causes a dryness of the mouth and throat, which is diagnostic, and is watched for as one of the first signs of constitutional impression."

"Mercurial ointment should be rubbed in with a piece of flannel; nurses have been salivated by using their hands for this purpose."

Turn where we will we find condensed information of like value. We must not, however, dilate upon this, but devote some short space to the arrangement of the book. In the introduction, Miss Dock discusses drugs from the following standpoints.

I.—Their source or derivation.

II.—Their physiological actions.

III.—Their ultimate forms and appearance as prepared in the pharmacy by definite, standard formulæ, for administration.

Further, she briefly defines technical terms, with which most nurses are familiar, but which frequently do not convey any very definite idea to their minds. She then gives a classification of drugs according to their prominent therapeutical actions, a table of poisons, with their antidotes and antagonists, and a description of the Metric System.

The book proper is divided into two parts. Part I. "The inorganic Materia Medica," and Part II. "The organic Materia Medica." Then there is a list of new drugs arranged alphabetically, an Appendix, and an exhaustive index, while blank pages are included for "Notes on New Drugs." By the way how many nurses can define the term "Materia Medica"? Let them buy this invaluable book and learn to do so. It is one to be possessed, studied, and treasured.

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