

## The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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### LECTURE VII.

#### THE NURSING OF HEART DISEASES.

There are many varieties of heart disease in children; (1) congenital heart disease; (2) pericarditis; (3) myocarditis which is inflammation of the muscular heart-wall or weakness of it causing stretching, so-called "dilatation of the heart;" (4) endocarditis, which is inflammation of the lining membrane of the heart, especially the valves which as a result become thickened and inefficient. Endocarditis may be acute or chronic; the former is frequent in the course of rheumatism or chorea, or from scarlet fever or measles, occasionally the symptoms are obscure at first, but generally lead to permanent changes in the valves with loss of their function, and as permanent heart disease, it may attack either the aortic or mitral valves, or both together, and leads either to obstruction to the passage of blood through them, or regurgitation backwards of the blood. When there is disease of the mitral valve there may be no symptoms, till, owing to either overwork or deficient nourishment, the heart muscle, which at first is increased in order to remedy the defect of the valve, breaks down and ceases to act efficiently. Then the following symptoms occur, due to the stagnation of the blood and its pressure backwards in the veins. The first change is congestion of the lungs, causing dyspnoea and predisposing to attacks of bronchitis, and occasionally causing blood-spitting, then following the vessels backwards, the right side of the heart is overworked, and the result is to congest the venous system, leading to dropsy of the legs, due to fluid exuding through the walls of the veins into the surrounding tissues. The liver becomes enlarged, and there may be jaundice; the stomach and intestines are engorged with blood, causing indigestion and perhaps vomiting; and the brain is affected, causing sometimes sleeplessness, &c. The heart then beats more frequently but less efficiently, there is often palpitation, and the

pulse is small and frequent and often irregular, and the face and extremities blue.

The aortic valve is not so frequently affected in children as the mitral and when it is affected the mitral is generally diseased, so the symptoms are those just mentioned. Myocarditis or inflammation of the muscle of the heart is nearly always a part of endocarditis in a child and assists greatly in weakening the heart, and causing symptoms of "break-down."

Pericarditis is inflammation of the membrane covering and enclosing the heart, it rarely occurs alone in children, but is accompanied by inflammation of the heart muscle of the endocardium. The symptoms are very few, there may be pain over the heart and tenderness, if there be exudation of fluid into the pericardium there may be dyspnoea and cyanosis, the patient may be able to lie back in bed, but in the worst cases he has to sit up in bed leaning forward in order to take the pressure as far as possible off the lung. The amount of fever present is very variable, the pulse is often very rapid. In cases of this kind there is much danger of sudden death from syncope.

*Congenital heart disease* may be due to defective development of the heart, or to inflammation of the heart before birth. The children are always weakly and often undersized, and there may be more or less blueness, sometimes only seen when the child cries; also the finger ends may be thickened (clubbed). These children are very liable to attacks of bronchitis, and the nursing must be with the object of preventing this, and also to prevent too great strain being thrown on the heart.

*The nursing of heart cases.*—The first and most essential point in cases of heart disease of all kinds is rest for the body and mind. The child should, if possible, be kept from any source of irritation or emotion, as this has a most prejudicial effect on the heart's action.

By bodily rest is not meant only rest in bed, but rest as far as is possible to the heart; by relieving it of some of its work. The patient should, if possible, be kept recumbent, but if this causes difficulty of breathing he must be carefully propped up by a bed-rest and pillows, in order to avoid strain and fatigue as far as possible. Another cause of strain of the heart is constipation and the efforts necessary to

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