

Annotations.

NURSES AS WITNESSES TO WILLS.

It often happens that private nurses in the course of their attendance upon the sick are asked to act as witnesses to wills. It is well that, as a rule, they should avoid complying with such a request, although circumstances may arise where this may not be possible.

They should always bear in mind that a person who is critically ill is not in the best position to make a will, that it may subsequently be disputed by relations, and a lawsuit instituted, in which case the witnesses to the will may be required to attend and give evidence, and this, to a nurse who is probably in attendance upon another case, and may be many miles away, is highly inconvenient. It is, of course, unquestionably a nurse's duty, in the case of any pressure being brought to bear upon a sick person to make a will—which in a clearer and better-balanced condition he would not do—resolutely to refuse to be in any way implicated, but, short of this, we believe it is wiser for nurses to suggest the names of other persons in the event of their being asked to act as witnesses.

A PROFESSIONAL DUTY.

It not unfrequently happens that a fatal accident occurs to a patient owing to the absence of the nurse on duty while attending to other patients. More especially is this the case in country infirmaries, where the nurse is often required to attend at night from eighty to a hundred patients in different wards. When such an accident occurs there is the inevitable inquest, the coroner and jury comment on the insufficiency of the nursing staff, and direct the attention of the Guardians to this point, and no blame is attached to the nurse, it being recognised that if she has so large a number of patients to attend, she cannot have all under observation at once, and the blame belongs primarily to those who require an impossible task of her.

But, granted that the Guardians are primarily responsible, does none of the responsibility belong to the nurse? A nurse who knows her work knows certainly that she cannot do her duty by eighty or a hundred patients, that some of these who need attention cannot receive it, that some who need constant watching must be left to the mercy of impulses which may end in self-destruction—

in short, that she cannot fulfil the duties of the office as she understands them.

There is the point. In making such an appointment, Guardians, who often know little of the duties involved in nursing the sick, may honestly believe that one nurse is sufficient to "watch" this number of patients when they are asleep, and to give them drinks if awake. That is the unprofessional point of view. But the nurse knows differently. She knows that she cannot perform all the duties entailed in attendance upon so many sick persons, and, knowing it, she accepts the post. Is she free from blame if accidents, which she might have foreseen, actually happen? Surely not! Was it not her duty before accepting the post to ascertain the duties connected with it, and, if she found these impossible of fulfilment, to point out the fact to the Guardians and to decline it on these grounds? This may seem a hard doctrine, but a little more moral courage on the part of nurses in such cases would result ultimately in the better nursing of the patients, and in the accordance of increased dignity and respect to the nursing profession, for what respect can be accorded to those who, for gain, undertake to perform offices for the sick, knowing well that the work required of them is impossible of fulfilment?

THE STATE OF THE STREETS.

The attention of the responsible authorities might with advantage be directed to the condition of the streets of London, which are in many instances discreditable to the capital of the Empire, and which certainly compare most unfavourably with those of some provincial towns, as, for instance, Cheltenham and Leamington, where they are efficiently cleansed and kept. One has only to traverse some of the streets in the parish of Marylebone to experience the discomfort entailed by ill-kept streets. Their unevenness affords numerous opportunities for the collection of puddles, the dust carts plying their unsavoury occupation in the middle of the day leave plentiful droppings by the wayside, and the pedestrian may consider himself fortunate if a sudden gust of wind does not whirl a piece of dirty paper in his face. Again, the crossings on a wet day are unspeakable, and the exasperated ratepayer is left to find out, if he can, what becomes of the large sums which he yearly pays for the efficient maintenance of the parish.

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