

OBSTETRIC NURSING.

— BY OBSTETRICA, M.B.N.A. —

PART I.—MATERNAL.

WHILST a Nurse is making these prudent preparations for her coming work, she should keep a watchful eye upon her patient, and be observant of those indications that mark the approach, though not the actual commencement, of labour, which we will call signs and symptoms. The former can be seen; the latter can only be felt and described by the patient, and you must give a thoughtful heed to all she tells you about herself.

The surest premonition of critical changes is the descent of the uterus towards the pelvis, which leads to a diminution in size and a peculiar alteration in shape of the abdomen, which has been described as a "flattening" or "sinking." It is a sign of great diagnostic value in a subjective sense, and should never be overlooked by a Nurse. We may know by it that the high-water level, as it were, of gestation has been reached, and that the tide is on the ebb. The first effect of this downward movement is to afford the woman a sense of relief, as far as pressure troubles on the diaphragm and abdominal viscera are concerned. This feeling of "wellness," if I may so call it, often leads to imprudences on the part of the patient, especially if young; for, lulled into a specious security, she is apt, unless advised to the contrary, to go too far, or remain too long from home, with oftentimes awkward, if not serious results. Nurses, too, have been heedless in this matter, and on the strength of the improved (?) state of things have gone out for the day, to find themselves absent when most wanted. No observant Nurse would do this, well knowing that active symptoms of labour may come on at any hour, after the changes described; and she, at any rate, should never leave her post of duty.

As the uterus begins to press more upon the pelvis, the patient becomes awkward in her carriage, and has a peculiar gait that can hardly be described, but any Nurse can recognize it, and knows that it marks still further downward changes. At this time the patient may complain of numbness or tingling, due to pressure on the pelvic nerves, down one or more of the lower limbs (rarely both), which is very distressing to women; and they often tell you, they having "all their pains in legs," there is nothing but delivery to afford relief.

When these pelvic pressure symptoms declare themselves, it is very desirable to pay attention to the state of the bowels, and I think a purgative

that acts upon the whole of the intestinal tract is far preferable to injections which only act on the rectum. A couple of compound rhubarb pills, taken at bed-time, and, where there is any little stomach derangement, followed the next morning (fasting) by a seidlitz powder, taken in half a tumbler of warm water, with a few drops of essence of peppermint, or ginger, added, is a safe, simple, and efficacious form of medication. It is at once aperient, saline, and carminative; it relieves the kidneys as well as the bowels, and I always found it beneficial, *when given under the conditions* above described—viz., symptoms of the nearness, but not of the actual commencement of labour. You must keep the patient in bed all the morning, and give her a cup of hot tea with plenty of milk in it, about an hour or an hour and a-half after she has had the powder. It is wise for her to keep in the house all day.

Now, as you may have to administer seidlitz powders during the lying-in period, let me say a word to you as to *how* to prepare them, and *when* to give them, for much of their efficacy depends on these simple matters. Dissolve the large powder in half a tumbler of *hot* water the night before, and stir it well round with a spoon; by this means you will get a thorough solution of the salts, which is important as to their aperient properties. In the morning take rather less than half a tea-cupful of *hot* water, and put the acid powder into it; you can add a few drops (twenty to thirty) of essence of peppermint or ginger. Put the tumbler on to a plate or saucer, and when your patient is ready mix the solutions together, and, stirring them up well, give them in a state of effervescence. These powders should always be given in *the morning*, on an empty stomach, and in warm water.

To resume our task. Increasing symptoms of pelvic pressure more and more manifest themselves, and the neighbouring organs show the influence of the changes going forward in the uterus. The bladder becomes irritable, leading to micturition; the rectum is similarly affected, giving rise to teasing tenesmus, and then we shall see the benefit of the simple measures before advocated, which will greatly tend to mitigate these distresses. At this time there is often an abundant flow of mucus from the vagina, which, if tinged with blood, will clearly show that labour is incipient, and you must at once make the necessary preparations.

Your first care must be the bedroom. Have a fire lighted, or laid ready for lighting. It is a good plan when the time of labour is approaching to have a fire laid in the bedroom and in your room beforehand, with a supply of fuel brought up, so that at any hour of the day or night you can

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